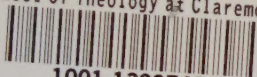


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THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST  
AND OTHER SERMONS

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*Sermons*

# THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST

AND OTHER SERMONS

BY

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## PREFACE

THESE sermons were written long ago, without any thought of publication. They were written simply for the occasions on which they were preached. A few of them have been delivered more than once, but most of them have been laid aside since the time when they were first delivered. Towards the end of last year my old pupil and friend, the Rev. J. H. Burn, asked if he might have some of my sermons with a view to the publication of a selection from them. Confidence in his experience and judgment encouraged me to consent to a course which I should have been slow to take without such prompting. From a portion of the stock which still survives a friend selected what seemed to be more than enough for Mr. Burn's purpose, and out of this selection he has chosen the twenty sermons which this volume contains.

A writer who keeps watch on his own mental processes knows that there is very little of that which he produces which can, in any strict sense,

be called original. This is specially true of one who writes on religious subjects. He may, perhaps, make some new combinations, or put some old truths in a new way ; but that is the limit for most of us. Religion is a field in which invention is perilous and discovery improbable. Dr. Pusey has said that it would be difficult to invent a new religious heresy, and it is given to very few to discover new religious truth. The writer of these sermons is aware that they must owe much to the words, spoken or written, of others ; but at this distance from the time of writing it would be of little use to try to specify particular instances of indebtedness. "Whether, then, it be I or they," the thing which is desired is, that what is now published should be of some help to those who read it.

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# I

## THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST

“ But He was asleep.”—S. MATTHEW viii. 24.

THAT life is full of mysteries, that the Christian religion is full of mysteries, are truisms with which we are familiar, and which none of us is likely to dispute. But in religion, at any rate, some of us are very unwilling to accept the consequences which inevitably flow from the fact that in this sphere we have to deal with subjects that are deeply mysterious—viz., that we shall often have to content ourselves with probabilities and uncertainties, because the subject in question is beyond our comprehension. Partial knowledge is not only imperfect, it is also almost certain to be misleading. However complete our knowledge of a part may be, it can never be free from difficulty and danger so long as the other parts remain unknown; for we have learned to know what we do know out of its relation to other things, which explain its meaning and purpose. Thus, in spite of our minute study and patient consideration of



the part, the most important truths respecting it may be still hidden from us, because we do not know its relation to the remaining parts and to the whole, which embraces them all. We readily acknowledge the folly of taking a brick from a house, to show to others at a distance, in order to help them to know what the building from which it comes is like; and none of us would suppose that a careful examination of the brick would enable him to speak positively as to the character of the building from which it had been taken. And yet, with regard to the mysteries of life and of religion, many of us are far less cautious and reserved, and think that a moderate attention to what has been revealed to us will give us the right to form confident opinions about what has not been revealed, and to condemn those who do not share these opinions. Lack of evidence is made light of, because we feel sure that we know what *must* be the case; and it sometimes happens that evidence which might be obtained is neglected, because we have preferred to make up our minds without further inquiry.

One of the great mysteries of the Christian Faith of which we cannot know more than a very small portion is the Nature of our Blessed Lord, both God and man. How much there is in our own nature which still baffles all our inquiries! how

much that it is quite conceivable that we may discover about ourselves which still remains unknown; how much that lies quite beyond our powers of imagination! And if this is true of our ignorance as to what man is, how much more true is it as to our ignorance of what God is! What, then, will be the difficulties in the way of certain knowledge when these two ignorances come together, and we set ourselves to comprehend what the union of two such natures will involve? *Man*, as we know him, is a created being, frail, dependent, mortal; liable to sin, to suffering, and to death. *God*, as we dimly conceive of Him by the revelation which He has granted to us in the universe, in Scripture, and in His Son, is an uncreated Being, Almighty, Self-sufficient, Eternal, All-perfect; Who is Spirit, and Light, and Love. The union of two such natures, even when we strike sin out of the account, entirely passes our comprehension, for it involves the union of Omnipotence with weakness, of Omniscience with ignorance, of the Infinite with the finite.

Hence it is that men's ideas of Christ have perpetually alternated between the error of emphasizing the Humanity so strongly as to lose sight of the Divinity, and that of insisting so strongly on His Divine nature as to make His

human nature almost unreal. It is easy to think of our Blessed Lord so habitually as the Son of Mary, and as our Brother, Who has shared temptation, suffering, and death with us, as to forget that He is also God; and it is also easy to think of Him so exclusively as the Son of God, Who was our Creator and will be our Judge, as to forget that He is very man, and one of ourselves, sin only excepted.

For earnest Christians who are striving to obey and to love their Lord, who pray to Him, and not only pray but worship and adore Him, the latter is the greater danger of the two. Religious and reverent minds are more likely to lose sight of His manhood than of His Godhead, and to be so mindful of the ascended Son of God at the right hand of the Father in glory, as to fail to recognize Him Who was tempted in the wilderness, sat wearied by the well, and slept in the fisherman's boat.

And hence the value of books and other writings which may at times startle us, and perhaps even pain and distress us, because in speaking of our Blessed Lord they say what appears to us to be very inadequate and even misleading, if not actually false. We scarcely like to read of Him in terms which might equally well be used of any other great teacher; or to see His life and work,

His doctrine and its results, dissected and criticized in much the same way as those of any remarkable man, from a purely human point of view. Still less, perhaps, may some of us be willing to raise the question as to what limitations He placed upon His knowledge by the fact of His becoming in mind as well as body very man, and how such limitations would affect the form of His teaching.

Yet all these things have real value in forcing us to remember and consider the truth that, with the enormous exception of sin, He consented to become in all points such as we are, and to take to Himself a human body, a human brain, and a human heart. Pilate, with his cold-blooded policy, gave utterance to a truth of which we have not yet exhausted the meaning, when he cried, "Behold the *Man* !"

Specially precious, therefore, ought those passages of Scripture to be to us which in a marked way remind us of the fact that He Who nearly 1900 years ago healed the lepers and raised the dead, Who Himself rose again and ascended into Heaven, had a body capable of hunger and thirst, of pain and weariness, and a soul capable of temptations, and disappointments, and fears. We read of His growing in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God; of His marvelling at men's unbelief; of

His weeping at Lazarus's grave; of His fearing His coming agony.

Not only as a child did He ask questions of the doctors in the temple when they were instructing Him in holy things, but as a man He condescended to ask for information which He might have had supernaturally had He so willed it. "How many loaves have ye?" "Where have ye laid him?" "Have ye any meat?" And here, in the text before us, we read of His being fast asleep. He is wearied out with the incessant labour of going about doing good, and has fallen into so profound a slumber that He is unconscious of the storm which so alarms His disciples. Not only the noise of the tempest, but even their cries, seem at first to have failed to arouse Him, for (as both S. Matthew and S. Luke tell us) "they *came* to Him and awoke Him, saying, 'We perish!'" Winds and waves might roar around Him, terrified companions might cry aloud for help, "but He was asleep." Can anything be more truly human than this? A frail, human body, utterly wearied out. He is indeed emptied of all His glory. As we contemplate the Messiah lying sound asleep on the fisherman's pillow, may not we reverently echo the words of mocking Pilate, and thankfully cry, "Behold the *Man*!"

But these simple words have other lessons



besides bringing home to us the reality of Christ's human nature. They also tell us something of His method of dealing with our own souls. For Christ's miracles are parables; each has a spiritual meaning beyond the testimony which it gives to His Divine power; and we shall lose much of their significance and helpfulness if we treat them merely as historical incidents in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. The miracle of His stilling the tempest on the Sea of Galilee is no exception. It has a voice and message to every one of us.

Some of us have known what it is to have a heavy, wearing, and protracted trouble. We have, perhaps, seen our earthly affairs become steadily less and less prosperous, until at last consequences of the most serious kind were staring us in the face. Or we have had a long and grievous illness, or have had to watch such a thing in the case of someone near and dear to us, and who was, perhaps, in the end taken from us; or we have had the misery of seeing how some dear friend or relation has gone fitfully but unmistakably downwards upon the path which leads to moral and spiritual ruin; and possibly our misery has been increased by the knowledge that we ourselves helped to lead him into that path. And in any or all of these troubles we have not kept silence from good words, nor held our hearts from entreaty. In the evening

and morning and at noonday we have prayed, and that instantly, and God (so it seemed to us) did not hear our voice. We cried aloud to Him, but there was no voice, neither any that answered. We prayed for help and deliverance in our trouble—"but He was asleep." And yet we can, perhaps, see now that the prayer *was* both heard and granted, not in the very way that we had asked, perhaps, but in the way that was "most expedient for us." And with the peace which has been given to us has come the gentle rebuke, "Why were ye so fearful? How is it that ye are still without faith?"

But there is one long and grievous trouble which we all of us have had, and from which, perhaps, we shall never in this world be free—the struggle with the manifold temptations which lay wait for our souls—especially with that sin, which a lifelong experience has taught us, does so *easily* beset us. At times these enemies press upon us with such violence that it seems to be scarcely possible to resist. "We reel to and fro and stagger like a drunken man." "The enemy crieth so, and the ungodly cometh on so fast." "Our sins have taken such hold of us that we are not able to look up." We utter a psalm or a hymn; but our praises will not rise to Heaven. We try to pray; but our entreaties seem to return cold and dead into our

bosom. Nay, even as we kneel, the storm of temptation rages so fiercely around us that it drowns our prayers, and we find ourselves in a tempest of evil thoughts, where we had hoped for the peacefulness of the presence of God. "But He was asleep."

No, not asleep, but waiting until this bitter cup had done its work in purifying our hearts from pride, in proving to us our own vileness and our utter need of His help, and in forcing us to cling closer to Him. The cry, "Lord, carest Thou not that we perish?" was already on our lips when He rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.

It is hard to believe that this cruel army of persecuting temptations is allowed to assail us only for our good; it is hard to be patient and thankful under the attack of a never-wearying foe; it is hard, when we seem to be forsaken, still to hope on and feel sure that He is near. But let us hold fast to the words of Job, "I *know* that my Redeemer liveth," and, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." Across the raging waters the voice will at last reach us, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid."

## II

### THE TEMPTATION OF CHRIST

“The tempter came and said unto Him, If Thou art the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.”—  
S. MATTHEW iv. 3.

No human being who passes the period of infancy is exempt from temptation, not even the Son of God Himself; and His example shows us that, as long as we are in this world, we must *expect* temptation. He was absolutely free from that source of temptation which is so distressing to all of us—viz., past sin. Experience has taught us again and again how disastrous in this momentous respect sin has been to us. Temptation has arisen at times when we should never have been vexed by it, if we had not previously yielded to it. At first we merely anticipated pleasure from transgression, but now we know from experience how great, and therefore how enticing, the tasted pleasure is. Moreover, the evil has become associated with things which formerly never suggested evil to us; but now these things do of themselves suggest evil. Sin breeds temptation far more

surely than temptation breeds sin, and a large number of the temptations which vex and trouble us are the results of previous falls. We should not be attacked now, or if attacked we should be far more able to withstand, if we had not yielded before, and thus by each act of yielding weakened our powers of resistance. All this, I say, we know from sad experience. By our own voluntary transgressions we have both increased the frequency of the assaults which are made upon us by our spiritual foes, and have also diminished the strength with which we were once able to resist them.

But those who have done better than ourselves—who have been more true to their baptismal vows, more loyal to their conscience and to God, and who have again and again in His strength won the victory when we have given way—they also are not free from temptations. They may not be vexed with them as often as we are, and when they are assaulted, they are more often and more completely victorious than we are; but they are not exempt, and they are not likely to be exempt. What is the steadfastness and holiness of God's greatest saints compared with the steadfastness and holiness of Christ? And did He by His steadfast holiness escape temptation? The season upon which we have now entered, at the beginning of which we commemorate Christ's temptations in



the wilderness, and at the end of which we commemorate His Agony and His Cross, is the answer to that.

Let us try to realize in some small measure what this means.

For thirty years Jesus Christ had lived an absolutely faultless life. As a child He had never been greedy, never been impatient, never been disobedient, never told a lie, never in any kind of way been idle, or selfish, or indevout. When He was twelve years old His parents took Him from Nazareth to Jerusalem for the Passover, and on the return journey they travelled a whole day without Him, but without feeling anxious about Him. They were so accustomed to His absolute trustworthiness, that not until night came and He could not be found did they begin to be perplexed and apprehensive. The next seventeen years are in accordance with this beautiful beginning. There is an unbroken and unstained development of all His powers—physical, intellectual, and moral. He advances in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man. The absolutely innocent and perfect child becomes the absolutely holy and perfect man; so that the demons in instinctive horror at once recognized Him as the opposite of themselves: “I know Thee, Who Thou art, the Holy One of God.”

And yet this Son of man, Whose character has the strength of thirty years' unwavering resistance to evil, and thirty years' unflinching walk along the path of virtue, is no sooner endowed with still richer powers by the descent of the Spirit upon Him than He is vehemently assaulted by the Evil One, and during forty days has to endure the whole force of his subtlety and skill.

Does it ever seem strange to any of us that we are so harassed by temptations? Do we ever feel inclined to complain and to wonder that God allows us to be so troubled? Are we ever disposed to think that by our long conflict with them we have earned repose and can almost claim exemption? Then let us remember Jesus Christ, buffeted during the whole of His ministry by the assaults of His and our great enemy. Even after His signal defeat in the wilderness, Satan departed from Him only "for a season"—that is, until he had a convenient season, another opportunity. At the close of His ministry Christ says to His disciples: "Ye are they which have continued with Me in My temptations." And a few hours later He said to His foes: "This is your hour and the power of darkness." Not until He died upon the Cross was the absolutely sinless Christ, Who had never done anything which could become a seed of evil, freed from the persecutions of the

Evil One. What right, then, have we, of whom the very opposite is true, to expect to be free from such things ?

And He has endured an intensity of temptation such as, perhaps, no other human being has ever experienced, and therefore He knows to the full how terrific such assaults can be. From personal experience He can sympathize with the very worst of our trials, and can succour us accordingly. Do not let us think that it is the man who at last has given way that can best sympathize with us in our troubles. The man who has given way has experienced temptation only up to the point at which he gave way, when perhaps Satan had by no means done his worst. But the man who has held out to the end without yielding has felt the whole strain, and can feel as no one else can for those who are striving to do the same. And such a one is Christ. It was not until the devil "had ended every kind of temptation" that he at last left Him. In all our temptations, therefore, we have the most complete guarantee that we have as our ally One Who knows, from His own experience, the very worst, and can therefore sympathize with us to the uttermost.

Moreover, His experiences in this respect prove to us that there is no sin in being tempted. We not only have "a High Priest that can be touched

with the feeling of our infirmities ; but One that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin " (Heb. iv. 15).

Nor ought we to be surprised if, at a season such as Lent, temptations are more, rather than less, frequent. It was so with our Lord in His solitude, and fasting, and prayer. If these things did not secure *Him* from temptation, much less are they likely to secure *us* from it ; for in them all we have our own sinful selves with us. This was the experience of S. Basil, one of the great founders of the monastic life. In one of his letters to his great friend Gregory, inviting him to come and join him in his little monastery at Annesi, he writes : " What I do myself day and night, in this remote spot, I am ashamed to write. I have abandoned my life in town, as one sure to lead to countless ills ; but *I have not yet been able to get rid of myself*. I am like travellers at sea who have never gone a voyage before, and are distressed and seasick, who quarrel with the ship because it is so big and makes such tossing, and when they get out of it into the small boat, are everywhere and always seasick and distressed. Wherever they go, their nausea and misery go with them. My state is something like that. I carry my own troubles with me ; and so everywhere I am in the midst of similar discomforts. So in the

end I have not got much good out of my solitude" (*Ep.* 2).

As was said at the outset, no one is exempt from temptation, not even at the time of his holiest aspirations. And every loyal Christian will believe that it is best for him that it should be so. Nor is this a mere matter of blind and trusting belief. In various ways it is possible to see that it is good for us to be tempted. Temptations, sometimes by their pettiness and meanness, sometimes by their foulness, are *very humbling to us*; and we all of us are in need of that medicine. To be often moved to think, or say, or do, what is contemptible or abominable, can hardly fail to warn us off the notion that we are better than others or near to being saints. And all temptations, if they are resisted, not only humble, but *strengthen* us. They brace and develop our characters. A man who is frequently having a contest with his own evil desires—desires which are, perhaps, the result of his physical nature or of his surroundings, rather than of his own self-indulgence—will end in being a stronger character than one who is not vexed with any such desires at all. And yet, again, troubles of this kind may enable us, by God's grace, to be the *more useful to others*. Just as we know that Christ is able to succour us when we are tempted, because He has experienced it all



Himself, so we, in a very humble way, may be the better able to aid our fellows when they are tried, because we have been through the fire ourselves. For these and other reasons we may not only take courage when we are often assaulted, we may even try to do as S. James bids us, and "count it all joy when we fall into manifold temptations" (i. 2).

"Commit thy way unto the Lord, and put thy trust in Him, and He shall bring it to pass. . . . The salvation of the righteous cometh of the Lord ; Who is also their strength in the time of trouble. And the Lord shall stand by them, and save them ; He shall deliver them from the ungodly, and shall save them, because they put their trust in Him" (Ps. xxxvii. 5, 40, 41).

### III

#### TAKING THOUGHT

“Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?”—S. MATTHEW vi. 27.

THE words of which this text is a translation can equally well mean, as some of you know, “Which of you by taking thought can add one span to his life?” And perhaps this is the more probable meaning. Not very many people are anxious about adding to their stature, and those who do take thought about using means to do so, do not think of making any such addition as a cubit—*i.e.*, as much as can be spanned with the arm from the elbow to the tips of the fingers. Whereas many of us, and perhaps nearly all of us, are at least at times anxious about adding to the term of our life. There are exceptions, no doubt; but to most people the wish to live long is a very strong and a very constant wish. And the question as to how human life may be prolonged is one which has occupied, and is likely to continue to occupy, the minds of thousands; a question which ever pro-

vokes speculation, not merely because of its intrinsic interest to the majority, but because, so far as we can see, it can never be proved to be incapable of solution. What is human life? Is it of necessity limited to four score, five score, or even six score years? Could it not, if we did but use the right means, be extended indefinitely? Even now a few people live to be considerably over a hundred years old. If we knew how to secure the necessary conditions, might not every one who does not die a violent death live far beyond the longest limit ever yet reached? The attempt to find the elixir of life, a search on which in former times hundreds of men have expended their lives, was an attempt to find a practical answer to this question; and it is a question which has produced a whole literature of its own. Without going back beyond Christian times, we may find numerous instances of a belief that the indefinite prolongation of human life is possible. S. John tells us that there was a report about himself that he was never to die, and we know from S. Augustine that centuries after S. John's death there were people who believed that the last of the Apostles was only asleep in his grave at Ephesus, and that the earth above him moved with his breathing. Joseph of Arimathea also was believed to draw perpetual life

from the Holy Grail in the blessed city of Sarras. The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus were said to have slumbered in a cave while 300 years of the progress of Christianity passed like a watch in the night. A monk of Hildesheim, who doubted how a thousand years could be in God's sight as yesterday, listened to the sweet notes of a song-bird for three minutes, as he thought, and found that in those three minutes three centuries had flown. On the other hand, there are legends of those who were punished by never being allowed to find rest in death: the Wandering Jew, the Wild Huntsman, the Captain of the Phantom Ship.

These stories, and others which might be mentioned, have their root in the question to which the text before us suggests the right answer, Which of you by taking thought can add a span to his life? The very form of the question tells us that the answer must be a negative one. None of us by any amount of anxiety and care can add anything to what has been allotted to us as our age. Each of us has an unknown term of days, and there are also general limits which no mortal can pass. The longing for an artificially-prolonged existence of indefinite length, and the giving anxious thought to attain to it, are plainly condemned as vain.

Our interest in the possible duration of human

life, and of the life of each one of us in particular, is a suitable thought for the first Sunday evening on which we meet together after the dawn of another year. We have lately turned over one more leaf in the history of the world and in our own careers; and such a time, on the one hand, appeals to our love of life, and on the other reminds us of its rapid flight. It imparts even to the younger among us a feeling of increased responsibilities, and it gives an increased value, like that of the Roman Sibyl's books, to the days that yet remain to us. A new year, a new University term, a new mode of life, may well make a shade of seriousness steal over the minds of those whose hearts are lightest; and in these moments of stillness we seem to hear the murmur of that usually unheard stream, which without rest or haste is carrying all of us onwards to the great Hereafter.

The history of the world, and especially of our own country, has been full of interest during the last twelve months, but let us not forget what for us is of more pressing interest still. The whole human race is one year nearer to the Day of Judgment, and each one of us is one year nearer to his end. The term of our life is lessened by a year. We have before us one year less of probation, one year less of joy and of sorrow, one year less of temptation and (must we

not add?) of sin. These are truisms, of course ; but there are abundance of truisms which we habitually forget or practically ignore, and a fact does not cease to be important because it is one which everybody must know.

Too many of us live as if our life here were never to end ; as if death, although constantly busy with others, were so indefinitely far off from ourselves as to be a possibility that we can afford to neglect. The young man seems to have the whole of life before him ; the man of fifty thinks himself still young ; at threescore and ten there appear to be many years of life still in store ; and even at fourscore and ten the possibilities seem to be still far from being exhausted. It is strange how often it happens that those who have had the longest experience of the unsufficing character of life are the least willing to quit it. There are those who can say that the days are come in which there is no pleasure, and yet they cling to the days themselves. But when all is said and done, "Which of us by taking thought can add one span to his life?"

Yet there is a taking thought, there is an anxious care, by which we can do far more than add months or years to our life upon earth ; by which we can add to it a period unmeasured by time, and can crown it with life everlasting—by taking thought



and anxiously weighing the difference between good and evil, between holiness and sin, so that we no longer halt between two opinions in the vain attempt to serve both God and Mammon. It must be a thought and a care that will lead to our choosing that good part which shall not be taken away from us.

And it must be no idle, dreamy thought; no mere musing over the beauties of holiness without any effort to realize them; no mere sentimental admiration for the sweetness and grace of saintliness, while we shrink from the self-denial which alone can make a saint. There are those who can dwell with affectionate emotion on the holy and heroic lives of others, and yet drift listlessly through life without any real effort to become what they admire, and who neglect commonplace opportunities of self-sacrifice because they cannot all at once become martyrs and heroes.

What we need is a thought which does not evaporate in feeling, but leads on to action, and expresses itself in deeds and solid work. We may, indeed, long to be perfect, even as our Father Which is in Heaven is perfect, but let us be content to aim low at first, and win small victories over self. We may think, although with awe and trembling, of actual martyrdom as a glory to be desired, so long as we do not despise the petty

martyrdoms of daily life. There are words and acts of our fellows, so trivial that they pass unnoticed, which nevertheless sting us to the quick. There are small accidents in our daily life which so fret and irritate us, that if we allowed them to get a firm hold of our imagination, and to become a constant subject for brooding over, they would tend to make life seem to be intolerable. There are the thousand petty annoyances which may be laughed at or groaned over, according as we are wise or foolish. The *habitual* bearing of such things with patience, cheerfulness, and even thankfulness, may show far more real heroism than the being able, in some moment of strong enthusiasm, once for all to lay down one's life.

This is the thought: thought producing action, producing habits, producing character, which moulds mankind, which wins great causes, which conquers the world. Is it our lowly desire to do our duty in some humble sphere, and keep our own lives free from the pollution which lies all around us and terrifies us? Or have we a noble ambition to take our full share in solving some of those large and anxious problems which confront every thoughtful observer of society? In either case the method is the same. Take anxious care about the daily thoughts, and words, and acts, out of which human character is built up. This

is the span, and much more than span, which each one of us can add to his life. This is the cubit, and much more than cubit, that each one of us can add to his stature—the crown of everlasting glory, the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. Character is the one earthly possession, the one thing of our own making, that we are certain of taking with us into the next world. What is meant by the resurrection of the body we do not know; scarcely more do we know of what is meant by the immortality of the soul. But this we *do* know—that such as we have made ourselves here, such we shall be in the world to come, and that the characters which our conduct has stamped upon us in this world are those in which we shall appear before the judgment-seat hereafter. It is not graceful thoughts and beautiful dreams that will serve us there, but “in every nation he that *worketh* righteousness is accepted with God.”

And let us not forget, with regard to all the good that needs to be done in the world, and all the evil that cries for remedy and extinction, that it is *we* who have to do the work and are responsible for it. Let us not shelter ourselves under such generalities as that “civilization must see to it,” or that “Christianity is the influence that must be brought into action.” The influence of Chris-

tianity means the influence of individual Christians—the influence of you and of me. It is our own *personal* influence that we have to look to in shaping the characters of ourselves and of our fellows. In the year which lies before us let us look to it that our influence is upon the side of what is loving and true and pure; take no thought of adding days to our life, but of adding something to the well-being of the world; so that, when the end shall come, the saying may be true of each one of us, “He asked life of Thee, and Thou gavest him a long life, even for ever and ever.”

## IV

### DIVINE FORGIVENESS

“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity.”—PSALM xxxii. 1, 2.

It has been well remarked that in the Psalms “the *devotional* element of the religious character finds its completest expression, and the soul is displayed in converse with God, disclosing to Him its manifold emotions, desires, aspirations, or fears. It is the surprising variety of mood and subject and occasion in the Psalms which gives them their catholicity, and, combined with their deep spirituality, fits them to be the hymn-book, not only of the second Temple, but of the Christian Church” (Driver). And there can be no doubt that one cause of this surprising variety is due to the fact that the Psalms, as we have them, spring from the hearts and pens of many authors, scattered throughout many periods of the history of Israel, from the time of David downwards. In the very different states of mind which they reflect, from the highest exultation to the

deepest despondency, and in the very diverse situations which they indicate, they give the experiences of many men and of many generations.

It is probable that, from the very earliest time when the Psalms began to be collected together into groups, some of them were attributed to David; and the whole collection has been frequently spoken of as the Psalms of David. In our own Bibles there are titles placed at the head of each Psalm, which attribute nearly half of them to him. These titles are of venerable antiquity; but they were placed where they are long after the time when most of the Psalms were composed, and they are for the most part untrustworthy. In not a few cases they cannot be correct, and they may easily be incorrect in many more instances, although, with our present knowledge, we cannot prove that a mistake has been made. These titles represent no more than the beliefs or guesses of Jewish scribes who lived long ago, who may or may not have had in some cases respectable evidence to guide them.

The 32nd Psalm is one which is not only declared by its title to be a "choice song of David," but which seems to be rightly so called. There is a large amount of agreement among those who are competent to give an opinion on the subject that this Psalm may safely be placed among those



which are to be assigned to the royal Psalmist. It is, ~~as some of you will remember~~, the second of the seven Penitential Psalms—those Psalms which S. Augustine is said to have had written out on the wall over against his sick-bed, that he might exercise himself in them, and find comfort in them in his sickness. They appropriately form a portion of the special services for Ash Wednesday, where, however, they have had a place only since the last revision of ~~our~~ Prayer-Book in 1662. And this 32nd Psalm, in particular, may well serve as a model of the spirit in which a devout soul should look forward to Lent, and through Lent to Easter.

If we regard it as an outpouring from the heart of the royal penitent, we shall see how beautifully it expresses what we should conceive to have been his feelings after his recovery from his great sin. The 51st Psalm would seem to have been the first result of the visit of Nathan to him. *It* contains the confession of his sin and his prayer for forgiveness. The 32nd Psalm tells us that the confession which was made has won the forgiveness that was implored, and expresses to us the heartfelt blessedness of a son who finds that he is not only pardoned, but welcomed back with open arms to his Father's favour and his Father's house. The Psalm appears to indicate—what harmonizes well

with the history of David—that there had been an interval during which the sinner hesitated as to whether he should lay himself bare before Jehovah and admit the whole enormity of his tangled sins, an interval which had been a time of great misery to himself. “While I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me : my moisture was changed as with the drought in summer.” The very springs of his life seemed to be dried up. But he found out that the attempt to spare himself the shame of confession was only prolonging his own misery ; it was remaining in a famished land when the plenty of his Father’s house was still accessible. But at last he determines to arise and go to his Father, with a view to admitting all his guilt. “I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid : I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord ; and Thou forgavest me the iniquity of my sin.” And, as in the case of the lost son, the penitent King finds a great deal more than forgiveness. He is welcomed back to a home where he will find shelter and preservation for evermore, and his return thither is signalized by joy and music. “Thou art my hiding-place,” says the Psalmist to the God Who has forgiven him ; “Thou wilt preserve me from trouble ; Thou wilt com-

pass me about with songs of deliverance." These songs will not be allowed to die away. Whatever henceforth the penitent may do in his recovered home, Jehovah will give him cause to praise Him. Thus the joy which comes from God in forgiveness and blessing returns to Him again in thanksgiving and praise.

Do we not feel that the restored penitent has struck the right note in his opening verses? "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity."

Let us linger for a moment longer over this outburst of emotion, that we may note the fulness of its expression. No less than three different words are used to express the sinner's wrongdoing; and there are three corresponding phrases to express the different aspects of the boon which can be won by repentance. The wrongdoing is called, first, "transgression," and then "sin," and then "iniquity." If we take the words actually used by the Psalmist rather than the English equivalents as our guide, we shall find that wrongdoing is regarded (1) as apostasy from God or rebellion against Him; (2) as a coming short of the mark or goal, missing one's aim, or wandering away from the right path; (3) as depravity, incurring guilt and punishment. All these different

aspects of sin will be recognized as just by those who have at all tried to consider what sin in its nature really is. By sinning we become God's enemies and opponents; we lose the true end of our own lives and go astray into the wilderness; we become distorted in character, and bring on ourselves those evils which prolonged distortion, whether of body or soul, is certain to produce.

For this threefold cord—not quickly broken—of sin a threefold deliverance is provided. And this threefold deliverance reveals to us three other aspects of sin, in addition to the three which are given to us in the names which designate it. Sin may be taken off, may be covered, may be cancelled. In other words, it is a sore burden; it is a foul blot; it is a heavy debt. Which of us does not know the truth of these statements? Have we not all felt how grievous is the load which our sins have laid upon us? how loathsome is the sore which it has introduced into our nature? how it terrifies us with the thought of an account for which a reckoning will one day have to be made? Nevertheless, for all these troubles and terrors a remedy has been provided, and a remedy within the reach of all. If only He is approached in the right way, a way which He Himself has revealed to us, the Righteous Judge, Who is also a loving Father, will take away the heavy burden, will

cover up the loathsome blot, will cease to reckon up against us the huge amount that is due. This Psalm, along with the Parable of the Lost Son, has been given to us to assure us of this blessed truth, and to remind us of the way in which it may be realized.

The way is this: In our spirit there must be "no guile"; no attempt to deceive either self or God. One of the first conditions of forgiveness is sincerity. There must be no keeping back of any part of the sin, either in the way of refusing to lay it open before God, or in excluding it from the resolution to eschew it utterly in the future. David, it seems, had at first lacked this absolute sincerity. He had tried to persuade his conscience that the evil had not been so very great, and had abstained from confessing it before God. But the suffering, both of body and soul, with which God's heavy hand afflicted him, brought him to the right way, just as the mighty famine in the far country brought the lost son to his home. This is the message, a message both of warning and of hope, which the Psalmist has for us: "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way in which thou shalt go: I will counsel thee with Mine eye upon thee. Be ye not as the horse or as the mule, which have no understanding; whose trappings must be bit and bridle to hold them in, else they

will not come near unto thee." Stubborn impenitence is not manly, but brutish. To refuse to yield unless forcible compulsion is used is a mark, not of freedom or intelligence, but of senseless folly. Man's dignity and privilege lie in being able to give a willing obedience to the God "Whose service is perfect freedom"; and this willing obedience is doubly necessary when for a time there has been disobedience and rebellion. In our turning again to God there must be absolute sincerity and absolute submission. We must be ready to accuse ourselves in full; ready to confess all that we have done, and to suffer all that He may impose. Then we may be sure of forgiveness. And *we* also shall be able to declare, for the comfort and instruction of others, the truth which our own experience in penitence has taught us—"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity."



## V

### THE CHILDLIKE SPIRIT

“And He called to Him a little child, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.”—S. MATTHEW xviii. 2, 3.

YOU remember how startled Nicodemus was when Christ said to him, “Except a man be born anew, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.” To Nicodemus the words seem to imply an impossibility—a going out of life, and entering it again, in order to make an entirely fresh start. And the words do mean that, only not in the carnal sense in which Nicodemus understood them. In the text before us we have a similar declaration, less startling, but at first sight surprising. We are not told to begin life again from the very birth. We are not even told to go back to our childhood and begin again from that point. But we are told to become *like* little children, for otherwise we cannot hope to enter Heaven. This perplexes us, because it seems to be at variance, not only with

our ordinary notions, but also with other passages of Scripture. And this is often the case with those who read their Bibles attentively. They now and then come upon texts which seem directly to contradict one another, a fact which ought to put us on our guard against drawing hasty conclusions from any one text; for there may be something said elsewhere which greatly modifies the meaning of that which we interpret so glibly. Thus we read: "Be not afraid; only believe"; but in another place, "Faith apart from works is dead." At one time we are told to "let our light shine before men"; at another, "not to let our left hand know what our right hand doeth." Here we are told to "turn and become as little children"; but elsewhere "to be as a child" is spoken of in terms of disparagement. "When I was a child," says S. Paul, "I spake as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child; now that I am become a man, I have put away childish things." Here and elsewhere he speaks of children as beings who are weak, frail, fond, and ignorant: and these, of course, are not qualities which we ought to desire. The qualities characteristic of little children which the text before us tells us that we must imitate and cherish are something very different from these. Little children *are* weak and imperfect; but they have some lovely attributes,

which are worth studying and cultivating. Let us see what some of them are. It was as a little child that Jesus Christ was presented to the Lord in His temple, and if we would make ourselves acceptable to God, it is by turning and striving (at however immeasurable a distance) to be like Him.

And it is those of us who are farthest removed from our childhood who most need this lesson. Amidst the atmosphere of excitement and unreality, of low aims and false standards, in which so many of us who are of riper years are compelled to live, it is a good thing, in thought at least, if not in fact, to set a little child before us and remind ourselves that *that* is the standard by which to try our conduct if we desire to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Do not some of us know only too well how cold-hearted we become as life goes on? How difficult it is to preserve that warmth and frankness which at one time it was difficult to keep within due limits. The very self-restraint, which we practise as a duty, may end in making us formal and unfeeling. And, strangely enough, the most opposite causes produce this same deadening effect. Anxieties, disappointments, and sufferings may do it; so also may prosperity, gaiety, and success. The pursuit of sensual pleasures will inevitably do so. But even without gross sins

mere life in society has a tendency to rob us of the freshness and simplicity of childhood: we become unreal, discontented, and unsympathizing. It is then, when our hearts have become deadened by ease and prosperity, chilled and soured by misfortunes, or perhaps brutalized by sensuality, that the sight, and even the thought, of a happy, innocent, and guileless child may be the very best medicine for us. Thoroughly bad men often have a feeling of reverence for little children; and most of us, unless we chance to have had singularly unhappy homes, look back with affectionate regret to the time of our own childhood, the chief drawback of which was that its incalculable happiness was not appreciated.

Then in our eagerness for life we wished our childhood  
done,  
And the golden future gleamed like distant ripples in  
the sun.  
We have hurried o'er life's wave to where it seemed so  
bright before;  
And the ripples *now* seem shining far behind us by the  
shore.  
Then let us back again, o'er the melancholy main,  
To the scenes and thoughts our childhood knew,  
And never wander more.

Feelings of this kind need not be mere empty regrets. There is a very real, because a high and spiritual, sense, in which we *can* "turn and become

as little children," and thus fit ourselves for the Kingdom of Heaven.

One characteristic which everyone notices in ~~little~~ children is their *simplicity*. Until they have been spoiled by contact with insincerity and vanity, they are so unaffected in all their ways, ~~so open in their likes and dislikes~~, so frank as to their ignorance and needs, so artless in their confidences. Readily believing all that they are told, as readily telling all that they think, they form the simplest notions of all that they see and hear, tormented by no doubts, no suspicions, no distracting contradictions. Thoroughly genuine themselves, they believe in the genuineness of everything. Unaccustomed to deceive, they neither dread nor suspect deception. Most of us find it difficult even to imagine such a condition of mind. The years which separate us from our childhood have been so full of what is the very reverse of guileless, that now we find it hard to go back, even in thought, to the simplicity of those early days. Of course, it would not be right, even if we could do it, to surrender that caution and reserve which contact with our fellow-men inevitably engenders. But we may be reserved without being insincere, circumspect without being suspicious. If childlike trustfulness cannot be regained, we can try to replace it by the ripper

virtue of the charity which "taketh no account of evil," which "vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly," which "hopeth all things, endureth all things." Living, as we must, in a state of society which is confessedly artificial, we are in danger of becoming artificial and unreal ourselves. Obligated to screen much of our inner life from observation, we are only too likely to become hollow and insincere, and, going beyond lawful reserve, to end in deceit and hypocrisy. We begin by guarding ourselves against being obtrusive, against parading our thoughts and feelings before those who do not require to know them; we end in acting a part, and (either for good or for evil) pretending to be other men than we are. Here we have much to learn from our former selves and from the children that we see around us now. Let us in this matter try to turn and become more genuine, more simple, more sincere.

Another characteristic which we find in little children is their *contentment*. Even in very comfortless homes little children are for the most part contented. A pebble, a shell, a potsherd, is all their wealth, and with it they are not only content, but happy. They are easily put out, it is true. A slight mishap will throw them into an agony of distress or temper. But their passions



go as easily as they come, and leave no tinge of bitterness behind. How different it is with ourselves! How much is required to make us even for a little while contented! How easily we become dissatisfied and inclined to murmur! How slowly we recover our brightness and even temper. And too often, long after the ruffles have at last disappeared from the surface, there is an under-swell of ill-feeling against those who have crossed our wishes. This is a more serious fault than we are apt to think. Feelings of discontent, of melancholy, of repining against God's will, of dissatisfaction and even of malice against our fellow-men, if cherished and indulged, become very grievous in the sight of God, and quite unfit us for the Kingdom of Heaven. Is it not a mockery to say, "Thy will be done," while we put no check upon our murmurings and discontent? Is it not worse than mockery to say, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us," when our hearts are full of revengeful thoughts against those who, we think, have injured us? In readiness to forgive and forget, in cheerfulness and contentment, let us try to turn again and "become as little children."

But the feature which Jesus Christ specially commended in the little child whom He placed

as a pattern before His disciples was its *humility*. "Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven." Think of the sense of dependence and inferiority which is so conspicuous in an unspoilt child. It is so ready to admit its ignorance and helplessness. No false pride restrains it from asking for information or comfort or support. It assumes almost as a matter of course that its elders are indefinitely wiser and cleverer than itself, able to do everything, and to answer all questions. And in some children this reliance upon others for everything is accompanied by another trait, which is, perhaps, akin to it—a deep spirit of reverence, not only for what is believed to be vastly superior to themselves in those whom they see and know, but in what is *not* seen. Children realize the unseen world very vividly, and listen with earnestness and awe to words about God and the angels and the Evil One. But we, who have become men, have put away all these things. We are still ignorant, but we no longer like to own it. We are still weak, but we prefer to disguise the fact. It galls us to know that others are superior to ourselves, and the one thing which we are fondest of asserting is our independence. If we have reverential feelings, we are half ashamed of them, and are afraid of being

thought childish for indulging them. We are ashamed of seeming respectful to our superiors, of being reverent when we mention God's Name or enter His house, of kneeling humbly on our knees when we profess to worship Him. "Verily I say unto you, Except ye turn and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."

But let us not forget that it is the childlike temper, and not childish conduct, that we have to cultivate. A child's innocence is a type of perfection, but it is not perfection itself. It is like a dewdrop on a blade of grass—able on its tiny ball to reflect the whole of Heaven. But it is to Heaven itself, and not to the mere reflection of it, that we must aspire. Childhood, with its simple joys and unsullied thoughts, is gone for ever; it was not God's will that we should retain these. What we have to lament is, not that we have lost the old reflexion of Heaven, but that we are still so far from the reality. Let that familiar thought of our early innocent days, especially when we see them still more beautifully reproduced in little children now, move us to wrestle onwards to that perfection of which they are a type and an earnest; so that at last, with simple, contented, and humble hearts, we may be presented unto God, and may serve Him day and night in His temple.

## VI

### MID-LENT SUNDAY

“Jesus took the loaves ; and when He had given thanks, He distributed to them that were set down.”—S. JOHN vi. 11.

THE miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, in the account of which these words occur, forms in more ways than one a fitting subject to be set before us on mid-Lent Sunday ; and, of the four accounts of it (the only miracle of which we have four separate accounts), that given by S. John seems to be specially appropriate to the season. In S. John’s account alone appears that command so startling in One Who had just been multiplying food to whatever extent it was required to feed the great multitude—“Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.”

We have reached the Fourth Sunday in Lent, and Lent is more than half over. How does this resting-place, this “Refreshment Sunday,” as it was sometimes called in olden days, find us in our spiritual career? Must we not all own that it does not find us where we wished to be, where

we hoped to be after more than three weeks of this season of repentance. Even if our devotions have been more frequent, they have not been more fervent. We have added, perhaps, a few minutes to our ordinary time of prayer; but they have often been minutes of wandering rather than of worship. We have bowed the knee a little more often, or for a little longer time day by day; but we have made little or no progress in bowing our hearts and our wills before Almighty God. Again, we have, perhaps, given up some small indulgence or enjoyment, in order to prove to ourselves that we are to some extent in earnest, and in order to make some sacrifice for the love of God and for hatred of sin. And yet the sacrifice has often seemed cold and dead, an empty formality, with no warmth or affection in it, an unwelcome duty rather than a willing offering. We do not see that we are much the better for it all. Our *temptations* are just as frequent as ever, and we cannot venture to think that our *falls* are less frequent. We had hoped that

“ From each stain and spot of sin  
The soul would have kept her fast within ;”

but we do not find that it has been so. Our souls are just as greedy of what is sinful as ever they were, and seem to be just as prone to

indulge this woeful greediness. We are ready to cry out with the Apostle, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?" Perhaps some have to lament that they have not kept Lent at all.

Well, this is disheartening enough; but it is something that we are conscious of the evil, and still more that we are sorry for it, and would be glad to amend it. Let us pray God that these good feelings may bring forth the fruit of good effort and good action. Good feelings which pass away without bearing fruit are worthless—are worse than worthless; for they beguile us into thinking that, because we have been feeling as we ought, we have really been doing something for God, and they will stand in the way of our really doing something in the future. Feelings which do not lead to action harden the heart. To feel pity for persons in distress is a good thing, *if* it leads us to try to help them; otherwise, it is a bad thing. For not only is it an opportunity thrown away, but it is an obstacle placed in the way of future opportunities. The next time that we see people in distress we shall not feel so much pity, and shall be all the less likely to try to help them. So also with feelings of sorrow about sin and shortcomings. Unless such feelings lead us to mend our ways, to avoid sin, and to live more

strictly, they do us harm rather than good. They make it all the less likely that we shall repent the next time that anything occurs to call forth such feelings. We cannot be too much on our guard, especially in these times of religious excitement, against supposing that our feelings are any test of our spiritual state. We may *feel* very sorry for our sins, *feel* very desirous of being reconciled to God—nay, we may even feel that we *are* reconciled to God, and yet be very far from Him. On the other hand, we may feel very hard-hearted and cold and dead, feel as outcasts from the sunshine of God's presence, yet be very near to Him. Oh no, dear people, feeling will not do, unless it leads to action. Steady perseverance in fighting against what we know to be wrong, in following after what we know to be right—that is the real security, that is the real test of sincerity. If, then, any of us feel that Lent has thus far not been what it ought to have been to us as a time of repentance and amendment, let us make the most of the next three weeks; let us gather up what still remains of it, that nothing more be lost.

This is one of the lessons which seem to be put before us in the Gospel for mid-Lent Sunday. Another is more closely connected with the words of the text: "Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks, He distributed to them that were



set down." If you look at what follows in this sixth chapter of S. John, you will see that on this miracle of feeding the five thousand Jesus builds His wonderful discourse of the Bread of Life, in which He proclaims Himself as the spiritual food of every believer, without which there is no life in the soul. "I am the living Bread which came down from Heaven: if any man eat of this Bread, he shall live for ever: yea and the Bread which I will give is My Flesh, for the life of the world. . . . Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the Flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood, ye have no life in yourselves." These are strong words, beautiful words, terrible words. Strong words for all of us; beautiful words for those who will welcome them, who will take of this Bread and live for ever; terrible words for those who reject them, and along with them reject that food which alone can give them life. No life in your souls! Who shall tell the full meaning of that? We can see our bodies; we cannot see our souls. Some of us know what a dead body is like. It is always an awful, sometimes a horrible, sight. Who can tell what a dead soul is like? and a soul that has been dead for months and years, dead and buried in the corruption of sin?

"Jesus took the loaves; and when He had given thanks, He distributed to them that were

set down." Those loaves have long since perished. The five thousand that ate of them in that grassy spot beside the Sea of Galilee have been in their graves for centuries. Like their forefathers who ate of the manna, they ate and died. The manna did not save from death the Israelites in the wilderness. The barley loaves did not save their descendants on the mountain-side. But there is a Bread which is still being broken for believers, year by year and month by month—nay, even day by day, of which if a man eat he shall live for ever. And thousands do not know of it; thousands of those who know of it turn away. The dreadful accusation brought by Christ against His people still holds good: "They have both known and hated both Me and My Father."

Is not this, then, another lesson which to-day's Gospel brings before us? It bids us begin and prepare ourselves for our Easter Communion. The Prayer-Book orders "that every parishioner shall communicate at the least three times in the year, of which Easter to be one." So that a person who does not receive the Holy Communion at Easter can scarcely be called a faithful member of the Church of England. May we not go even farther and say that such a one can scarcely be called a faithful Christian? For if we refuse to come, it will probably be either because we know

that we are living in sin, and therefore have no right to come—and then, of course, we are not faithful Christians—or because we do not believe that Holy Communion will do us the good which Christ has promised, and then we are not faithful, but unbelieving.

Let us all, therefore, strive to spend the next three weeks better than the last three, with more earnest desire really to love God and His Divine Son, and (as a consequence of this) with a more hearty detestation of sin, and sorrow for having so often been guilty of sin. And let us at once test and strengthen our love of God and our hatred of what displeases Him by a humble and trusting resolution to do our best to meet the Risen Lord on Easter morning at His Holy Table, where He will be ready to distribute to us, not fragments of barley loaves, as on the uplands of Galilee, but His own most precious Body and Blood.

## VII

### THE LAW OF LOVE

“A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another ; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another.” — S. JOHN xiii. 34, 35.

IN his First Epistle S. John seems to be referring to this all-embracing commandment when he speaks of the commandment which is both old and new : “Beloved, no new commandment write I unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning : the old commandment is the word which ye heard. Again a new commandment write I unto you, which thing is true in Him and in you.”

The command to love one another was *not* new to mankind. It is as old as the human race itself. It is an original human instinct ; a fundamental obligation. Wherever first two human beings lived together, there the obligation to mutual affection existed, and was attested by the inward promptings to affection of which each was con-

scious. A Divine sanction was at once imposed, for the first breaches of it were fearfully punished. When woman first transgressed it by robbing man of his innocence, her sentence was, "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception." And when Cain transgressed it by robbing Abel of his life, he was told by the Almighty that the earth which he had polluted with his brother's blood should no more yield its strength to him when he tilled it, and that he should henceforth be a fugitive and a vagabond on the face of it. No, even to the Gentile, whose whole life was, generally speaking, one long violation of it, the command to love his fellows was not in the strictest sense new.

Still less was it new to the Israelite. Every well-instructed Jew knew that it stood written in the Book of Leviticus: "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart. . . . Thou shalt not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the Lord." If the obligation to love one's fellow-man was as old as the human race, the obligation to love him *as oneself* was as old as Judaism. It was an original precept of the Mosaic code, and lies at the bottom of many of its minute ordinances. No; if not to the Gentile, still less to the Jew,

was the command "love ye one another" a new commandment.

S. John, then, is amply justified in calling it "an old commandment which ye had from the beginning." But what does he mean, and what does our Blessed Lord mean, in calling it so emphatically a new one?

*First*: it had been promulgated afresh. It had been proclaimed anew, and that in much clearer language. The original instinct of mutual affection, born in Heaven and renewed in Paradise, had long since been almost forgotten; and even by those who had some faint recollection of it, it was persistently ignored. Other instincts, far more congenial to man's fallen will, had stifled it or driven it out of court. Its faint whisperings were scarcely heard among the blatant voices of selfishness, and policy, and passion. A Socrates or a Cicero might here and there suggest beautiful precepts of self-restraint, benevolence, and toleration; but "what were they among so many?" And what chance had they against the self-indulgence, which long generations of practice had stereotyped into a habit, and which even philosophers had formulated into a system? Nor did the Jew need a fresh promulgation of the law of love much less than the heathen. He had so narrowed the scope of the command to love his

neighbour, so overlaid it with qualifications and exceptions, that the word of God was made of none effect. In a large majority of cases it was easy to bar the way against this inconvenient obligation by raising the previous question, "And who *is* my neighbour?" And when it was quite evident that at any rate a man's own parents must be considered as among his neighbours, there was the monstrous device of Corban to fall back upon. While, as regards the whole of mankind *outside* Judaism, the Divine command had been not only evaded but turned upside down by the portentous addition "hate thine enemy."

But Christ's law of love was a new one for other reasons than because it was promulgated afresh. It was not merely the old instinct of our unfallen nature, dragged from its obscurity and quickened into new life. It was not merely the old Mosaic precept, freed from glosses and perversions, and set forth once more in its original simplicity and comprehensiveness. It was all this; but it was a great deal more. It was the old instinct, the old precept, so transfigured, so enlarged and glorified, as to be indeed "*a new commandment.*" It was new in its extent, new in its sanction. It was no longer the old vague principle of loving one's fellow-man. It was no longer the old standard of loving him as oneself. It was no longer the old



sanction of loving because God had commanded us to love, and would punish us if we did not. No : “ Even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.” *That* is the new standard ; *that* is the new sanction—“ the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” Not the measure of our love for ourselves is to be our standard in determining how we should love others, but the measure of Christ’s love for us. Not fear, not even obedience, is to be the mainspring of our love, but love itself. Love is to kindle love, and the newborn fire is to know no limit but that of the fire that kindled it. “ Even as I have loved you.” In discovering our duty towards others it is not enough to ask, “ What, if our positions were reversed, should I wish them to do to me ? ” That is an exceedingly practical and very useful question ; it will help to clear the ground. But it is not the final question, and it may lead us into grievous mistakes ; for we often wish others to do for us what would be anything but really beneficial to us. The final question is this : “ What would Jesus Christ have me to do ? ” And, when we have answered it, and find our selfish wills shrinking back from the answer, let us confront them with another question : “ What has Jesus Christ done for me ? What is He doing for me still ? ” “ Even as *I* have loved you, that ye also love one another.”

On this Maundy Thursday, this *Dies Mandati*, or "Day of the Commandment," as it used to be called in days gone by, let us ask ourselves what *we* are doing towards the fulfilment of the command. This is a question of a serious kind. It is a *test* question. Nay, by the appointment of Christ Himself, it is *the* test question. "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another." This is the true note of the Church. Not *miracles*—miracles are no absolute test of truth. Christ has warned us that "there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect." Not *formularies* or *discipline*, for both of these may change; and a past discipline may be a present heresy. Not *numbers*—numbers are no test of truth. Truth may be on the side of an Athanasius or a Galileo against the large majority of Christendom. The ultimate, absolute test is *love*. Where is the man that loves Christ's little ones, loves his neighbours, loves his enemies, and loves them *because* Christ has loved him and *as* Christ has loved him? There in the noblest form is the true Christian. Tertullian, after declaring the affectionate care which Christians in his day showed towards all in want, or in weakness, or in trouble, goes on to say that it is mainly the working of

love of this kind which has caused the heathen to put a brand on them. "See," they say, "how these Christians love one another!" For they themselves hate one another. "And how they are willing to die for one another!" For they themselves are more ready to kill one another.

What account would the heathen give of each one of us in this respect, if they had the opportunity of observing us closely? Would the one feature in our conduct which impressed them most profoundly be this—the self-sacrificing affection which we habitually display towards our fellow-men? On this solemn evening, while we follow our Blessed Lord from that upper room, in which He instituted the Sacrament of Love, to the garden in which His love triumphed over the extremity of human suffering, and even welcomed it for our sakes, let us be honest with ourselves and with Him, in giving the answer to this question.

Don't let us shelter ourselves under vague generalities, as we complacently think of all the blessings to society of which Christianity has been the author or the augments. They are numerous and great, and we are bound to give thanks to God for them. But what have *we* contributed towards them? What is each one of us doing, day by day, to make mankind, and especially those with whom we come most closely in con-

tact, healthier, happier, holier? "See how these Christians love one another!" Oh, dear people! can any of us dare to appropriate such words as these and not feel that they are a bitter sarcasm?

What are our daily thoughts? Those unworthy suspicions of the motives of others, those pitiful jealousies of our neighbours' advancement, that miserable sensitiveness about the deference paid to ourselves, that diabolical gloating over what brings shame to others—are thoughts of this kind quite unknown to us?

What are our daily words? Those impatient rejoinders which seem to imply that the whole world is bound to satisfy us; those explosions of anger when our wills have been thwarted; those harsh criticisms on the conduct of others; that eagerness to repeat what is discreditable to our neighbour, without any attempt to verify it, or to consider whether any *good* can come of repeating it; that stirring up of strife, which but for our biting tongues would have died out—can we plead "not guilty" to such things as these?

And what are our daily acts? Let us cast our minds back over the last few days and roughly calculate how much of our time and energy have been bestowed upon unselfish attention to the wants of others, how much upon selfish promotion of our own personal interests; and what

kind of a balance-sheet can we present to our consciences and to God? How many kind acts have we performed? and how many unkind ones? How much money have we spent on good works? how much on our own pleasures? Have we cared whether our influence has been good or bad on the souls for whom Christ died? Have we been liberal with our prayers, trying at least in that way to alleviate suffering and to lessen sin? As we amuse ourselves with our newspaper, do we ever send up to God a momentary prayer for those whose suffering or whose shame has been a pastime to us?

When S. John was so old and infirm that he had to be carried to church, he used instead of a sermon to say Sunday after Sunday to the congregation, "Little children, love one another." At last they asked him, "Master, why dost thou always say this?" "It is the Lord's command," he replied; "and if this is fulfilled, it is enough." *If* this is fulfilled. "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, *if* ye have love one to another."

## VIII

### THE CENTURION AT THE CROSS

“ Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.”—S. MATTHEW xxvii. 54.

MANY of us no doubt have witnessed a death—the death, probably, of someone near and dear to us. To our own dying day we shall never forget it : it was one of those events, necessarily rare in life, that in a few moments impress a stamp upon us which a lifetime cannot efface. For there are times, and they are for the most part times of trial and suffering, when God seems to have singled us out from the crowd, and to be dealing with us no longer in the mass with others, but by ourselves alone. It is then that His finger touches us and puts its mark upon us. We cannot but receive it ; but of what character—whether for our health or our falling—the mark shall be rests mainly with ourselves. We are not dead metal, but living souls. Such moments are full of awe, not merely because of this more immediate con-

tact with things unseen, but because of the increased responsibility ; for we have one more great crisis to answer for, one more opportunity of making a fresh start on the flood-tide of feeling, which a crisis of this kind almost necessarily involves.

And yet, after all, how small the event was which effected all this ! The death of just one out the myriads of the human race. How few there were that even for a short time missed him. How very narrow was the circle of affairs that was in any degree affected by his loss. If we ventured to face the world on the very day the blow struck us, we found everything going on exactly as usual—the sun shining as it is to-day ; the birds singing as they are to-day ; men hurrying to and fro for business or for pleasure as, alas ! they are doing to-day. Everything unchanged to all but ourselves. To us the very sameness is startling : it would be so much more natural to find everything at a standstill. But in spite of the evident want of change in the world around us, we cannot for a moment doubt the reality of the change which has come over ourselves.

Once, and once only, in the history of the world all surrounding circumstances *did* change, in order to be in harmony with a scene of death. Once, and once only, Nature *has* swerved from its iron



course for the sake of a dying man, and shown clear signs of distress and suffering, in order to be in sympathy with a soul in agony. And well might it do so, for the agonized soul was the soul of its Maker and its Master. When the human soul of Christ took its willing flight to the hands of its Heavenly Father, the sun hid its face, "the earth did quake, and the rocks rent"; the very graves (so men believed) set free their dead.

It was sights and sounds such as these which told upon the centurion and his companions, and wrung from them that marvellous confession, "Truly this was the Son of God."

In all that multitude they were the very group from whom one might *least* have expected it. Such an exclamation would have come naturally from the lips of the disciples. It would not have surprised us had it been uttered by the crowd. A mob which had been raised to such enthusiasm *for* Him on Palm Sunday by the report of the raising of Lazarus, and to such frenzy *against* Him by the machinations of the priests, might easily have been won back (we think) by portents like these. Nay, it would not wholly have astounded us if it had proceeded from the priests themselves. The darkness, and the earthquake, and the rending of the veil, might have forced home the truth even on *them*. But no. The

priests are already preparing to take further measures against "that deceiver." The most that any of the people do is to smite their breasts and return. And as for the disciples, "the things which should have been for their wealth are unto them an occasion of falling." The very things that should have turned their hopes into certainties, robbed them of hope altogether. On Easter morning the news of His Resurrection seemed to them as "idle tales."

No. The only persons able to interpret these awful signs aright are despised Gentiles, and among these, not people of thought and culture, but Roman soldiers. Let us make all due allowance for what was excellent in the armies of Rome. They were the one great element of discipline and order in an age of boundless moral anarchy. They were, to a large extent, the salt of the Empire, saving it for awhile from the consequences of its corruption. But their military system gave a terrible organization to that love of cruelty and bloodshed which unregenerate man shares with the brutes, and of which the Roman had his full share. Soldiers who had ground whole nations under their iron heel, and to whom bloodshed was pastime, were not the men most likely to be impressed by the execution of a Hebrew peasant.

Nor *was* it the execution which touched them. The cruel punishments of Rome had made them familiar enough with scourging and crucifixion. But they had had other experiences to-day. They may have been part of the band who found themselves prostrate on the ground at the mere word of their prisoner. And what did the legionaries of Rome think when they heard of "legions of angels" being at their prisoner's command? They may have heard, one of them may have carried, the message from Pilate's wife. They had heard the cry of the Jews, which made Pilate "the more afraid," and of which their own exclamation seems to be an echo—"by our law He ought to die, because He made Himself Son of God." And no doubt they had been on duty during the whole of the three hours of darkness, at the close of which came the earthquake.

Nor was this all. Over and above all this they had heard the last great cry with which that life, which redeemed the world, was yielded up. And S. Mark tells us that it was this cry, even more than the surrounding wonders, that called forth the confession of the centurion: "And when the centurion, which stood over against Him, saw that He so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, 'Truly this man was the Son of God.'"

And why?

Possibly because such proof of unsubdued power, after the long hours of agony and exhaustion, seemed nothing short of miraculous. But still more, perhaps, because His dying immediately after such proof of power showed that, after all that the malice of His enemies had inflicted on Him, His death was voluntary. He *surrendered* His life. "No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself." Those who are familiar with the Greek of the Gospels will remember how careful the Evangelists seem to be to select language that expresses this fact. And some may remember how S. Augustine comments on it: "'He bowed His head and gave up the ghost.' Who can thus sleep when he pleases, as Jesus died when he pleased? Who is there that thus puts off his garment when he pleases, as He put off His flesh at His pleasure? Who is there that thus departs when he pleases, as He departed this life at His pleasure? How great the power (to be hoped for or dreaded) must be His as Judge, if such was the power He manifested as a dying man."

There is yet one more fact, which may well have contributed to produce this startling conviction in the minds of the centurion and his companions, the dying *words* of Christ: "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." They had

heard that He claimed to be "Son of God," a title quite unknown to them among their own divinities and heroes. What did it mean? "Son of Jupiter," "Offspring of the gods," they could have understood; but, "Son of God"? It had made even the unscrupulous Pilate tremble. And now, after all the suffering and ignominy that had been heaped upon Him, in spite of hours of agony on the Cross, they heard Him calmly and naturally making the same mysterious claim, and addressing the unseen Ruler of the Universe as His Father. Death stared Him in the face; to speak falsely in the hour of death is scarcely human; and yet with His dying words He had commended His spirit into the hands of that Almighty Father, whose Son from His childhood upwards He had claimed to be. It was this, then, that drove the truth home to the Roman soldiers. The darkness and the earthquake might mean much; Christ's mighty cry and willing surrender of His life might mean more; but the "quietness and confidence" with which He commended His spirit to His Heavenly Father was irresistible. "Certainly," they said, "this was a righteous man." Certainly this man was no deceiver. "Truly this was the Son of God."

The assent of more than eighteen centuries has ratified their verdict. And it will hold good till

He Himself makes good the promise made to Caiaphas: "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of Heaven." The verdict has often been disputed, and is disputed still. In the literature of the day we are often assured that the centurion's confession is a mistake, the belief of eighteen centuries a delusion. We will not stay to combat such a statement now. At the foot of the Cross, on which our Lord and Master yielded up His life for us, the voice of controversy is hushed.

But let us not return from that sacred spot quite empty-handed. Let us say to His departed spirit, which hovers round us still, "I will not go away except Thou bless me."

What seems to have carried conviction to the mind of the centurion has its lessons for us, although we may have his conviction already, and may need no further evidence.

1. Christ's willing surrender of His life may teach us that in the spiritual world there is only one royal road to success—the surrender of self. He Who "hallowed birth by being born" and "conquered death by dying," conquered the stubborn wills of men by surrendering His own. And there is no other way for us. "Not My will but Thine be done" was His prayer during His agony,

and it is ours to-day. We shall have missed the chief of all the many lessons which this Holy Week teaches if we have not learned to yield our wills a little more readily, a little more cheerfully, a little more thankfully, to the will of our Father, Who gave us the wills to yield. This is not a lesson to be buried in a napkin until some great affliction calls it into use. It is a lesson for every day and every hour. There is no annoyance too trifling for the exercise of it. If in the petty vexations, of which we may have a dozen a day, we learn to submit with cheerfulness for the sake of Christ's Cross, we shall be ready even to *give thanks* to Him for His chastisement when He sees fit to bruise us more severely. Thus all our lives long we may share the mind of our dying Master. To us to live will be Christ, and to die gain.

2. And this easily leads us to the second point—our Lord's commendation of His spirit into the hands of His Father. If we have in any way learned to surrender our wills to God, we shall not find it hard to commend our whole being to Him. The right to do so has been won for us by Christ. That which would be an abomination to *Him*, who charges even the angels with folly, becomes a sweet-smelling sacrifice when united with the sinless Victim of the Cross. Christ's offering was a double one: His own Divinity and our



humanity. Ours must be double also : ourselves with Christ, Christ with ourselves. God will not accept either singly. It is vain to offer Christ to God unless our own hearts are offered with Him. It is vain to offer ourselves to God unless Christ also is offered with us. "Without Him we can do nothing."

And this also is a work, not for a few great and rare occasions, but for our whole life. In all that we do we must ever be commending ourselves, in union with Christ, to God. Yet there are times when it may be done with more than usual solemnity and devotion, and among these surely is our Easter Communion. Let Easter morning, or at least some day in Easter Week, find us on our knees before God's altar, saying with all the humble confidence a sinful soul may cherish, and all the loving self-sacrifice a grovelling heart can feel : "Father, into Thy hands I commend my life. Do with me as seemeth best unto Thee in time and in eternity." And as we retire with the seal of Christ's Body and Blood within us, assuring us that the fire of the Lord has fallen upon our offering, we shall know, not by the darkness and the earthquake, but by the light and peace of His presence, that "truly this is the Son of God."

## IX

### GOD IS LIGHT

“And this is the message which we have heard from Him, and announce unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.”—1 S. JOHN i. 5.

“THE message which we have heard from *Him*.” S. John does not say from *Whom*. He is so full of the thought of Jesus Christ that he omits to name Him; just as S. Mary Magdalene, on the morning of the Resurrection, omits to name the lost Master of Whom *her* heart is so full—“Sir, if thou hast borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away.” Those whose hearts and minds are really filled with Jesus Christ have the less need to have His Name often on their lips. From the time when His Virgin Mother “kept all these sayings in her heart” it has commonly been so. It was, of course, from his Divine Master that S. John received that message which he here delivers to his readers, to the Church throughout all ages. “And the message is this—that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.”

“God is light”: not *the* light, nor *a* light, but “light.” Light is His very nature. Side by side with this message we must place the other great statement about God in this same Epistle; “God is love.” Only by illustrations and analogies can our very limited understandings be made a little to comprehend what God in His inmost nature really is. How can our finite minds grasp the Infinite? All that we can do is, by means of reverent comparisons and similes, to gain some remote and imperfect idea of Almighty God. We look at ourselves and our fellow-men, and we find that we have two great sides to our inner nature—an intellectual and a moral side. With our *outer* nature, our bodies, we have here nothing to do. God has no body; it is not as regards man’s body that he was made “in the likeness of God,” but as regards the higher part of his being, his intellect and his will. S. John sums up the nature of the Almighty on what we may venture to call the intellectual side by the great announcement that “God is light”; he sums up the same on the moral side by the not less momentous declaration that “God is love.”

“God is light.” That statement will give us enough and more than enough to fill our thoughts during the short time at our disposal to-day. That God is in His very nature light is an announce-

ment made by S. John alone among writers in the Old and New Testaments. S. James tells us that God is the *Father* of lights, S. Peter that light *belongs* to God, S. Paul that God *dwells* in light ; but S. John alone tells us that God *is* light, and that Jesus Christ said of Himself while He was on earth, "I am the light of the world." This aspect of Almighty God was a new revelation to the human race. To the heathen, God is a God of darkness, an unknown Being, a Power to be blindly propitiated, not a Person to be known and loved. To the philosopher He is an abstraction, an idea, a something very far removed from us, and one that our minds cannot really apprehend. To the Jews He is a God that hideth Himself, a jealous God ; not light, but a consuming fire. To the Christian alone He is revealed as light, a Being absolutely free from everything impure or unholy, from everything gross or material, from everything erroneous or obscure, from everything dark or gloomy. Light was the first thing which God's creative energy produced when He made the world ; an earnest of good things to come, and the condition of their existence. From light spring order, beauty, life, growth, and joy. Of all the things which we see and know in this world light best represents the elements of all perfection. We therefore recognize it as nothing

less than a Divine inspiration when S. John tells us that "God is light." No definition more simple, and at the same time more deep and full, could have been given to us. It comes home to everyone who has eyes to see brightness and beauty, and sensibility to feel warmth and joy. The simplest child can understand something of what it indicates. The profoundest philosopher cannot think out all its meaning. It tells of a glory and a goodness that is perfect, that is inexhaustible, that can penetrate everywhere, that is *ready* to penetrate everywhere, with untold blessings in its train, if only we will grant it admission.

If only we will grant it admission. That, dear people, is the whole question. We can close fast our shutters and our doors and shut the light out. And we can close fast the doors of our hearts and shut God out. Light, in spite of its all-pervading power, is not irresistible : we can live in the dark if we please. And, though God might be irresistible, He does not will to be so. He allows us to reject Him, if we choose to do so. He offers Himself to us as freely and as bountifully as He offers us the sunlight. But if we refuse to accept Him, He does not will to be accepted. He may, in His mercy and goodness, offer Himself again and again to our sealed-up hearts, just as the sun goes

on shining upon our closed doors, but He will never *force* Himself upon us. And thus it comes to pass that the mournful saying still remains true, just as it was in S. John's day: "The light has come into the world; and men loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil." Men *love* the darkness. How true that is! and yet how strange! Just as light so excellently represents the elements of all perfection, so darkness seems to sum up the elements of all evil: foulness, impurity, secrecy, error, repulsiveness, and gloom. In all but the lowest forms of existence it inevitably produces decay and death. Some of us, perhaps, have known what it is to open a dark closet or a cellar that has been shut up for years. What a sight, and what an atmosphere we found! The foetid air, the long accumulations of dead and decaying matter, the filth and the mildew, the foul and sickly looking insects shrinking into their loathsome homes at the unwonted appearance of light. Such a storehouse of all that can excite disgust, and breed disease and death, is but a faint illustration of the condition of that soul from which God has been shut out for years.

Dear people, let not any of us think, "This in no way applies to me." We all of us, even the best of us, shut God out. It may be that by His grace He is not *wholly* excluded from the house of

our souls. We have not closed and barred *every* door and window against Him. We do *at times* give Him a welcome, or at least we *wish* to do so. But we each of us, whether we know or not, have *some* hidden recesses which are never submitted to His searching, purifying presence, which are never laid bare before Him, that He may cleanse the foulness and heal the sore; and which are therefore still sources of weakness and of danger to our souls. "Cleanse Thou me from my *secret* faults" is a prayer that we *every one* of us have need to use. And S. John's great message will help us to feel the real meaning of this prayer. "God is light; and darkness in Him there is none at all." If we would have fellowship with Him and a share in eternal life, we must walk in the light, and bring all our actions, and words, and thoughts, to the light, that whatever is amiss may be confessed, and washed away in the Blood of Jesus Christ. Darkness separates us, not only from God, but from one another. We lose one another in the dark. When the plague of darkness fell upon the Egyptians, "they saw not one another, neither rose any from his place." So it is always. The darkness of sin and selfishness takes away our sense of *Christian* brotherhood. We are near our brethren, and yet we do not know them. The darkness of misunderstanding and self-will robs



us of our sense of *human* brotherhood. We mingle with our brethren, and mistake them for strangers or enemies. How many quarrels, how many enmities, how many estrangements, a little light, fresh from the Divine atmosphere of Heaven, would have chased away once for all!

“God is light.” Could we have a better thought to bear about with us and meditate upon in the brightness of these long summer days? The whole smiling face of Nature is full of it from early dawn to late nightfall. The very nights are scarcely dark, as if even the midnight sky refused altogether to forget it. Shall man alone shut his heart against it? Let the remembrance of His all-pervading, all-seeing presence sanctify the freedom of our summer joy, that our holidays may be holy days indeed.

“God is light.” Does not this message of Jesus Christ, handed down to us through eighteen centuries by the pen of His beloved Apostle, come home to us as full of special meaning to ourselves at a time when our thoughts are full of the institution to which we all owe allegiance, and which has now had its share in fifty years of history. A University is nothing if it is not a centre of light. To collect and to diffuse again over as wide a surface as may be all the light that it can gather together is the very office and purpose of a Uni-

versity. *Intellectual* light in all its inexhaustible varieties, *moral* light in all its strength and nobility, *spiritual* light in all its serenity and grace, it is bound to value, and treasure up, and dispense to the world. Only so far as it does this has a University any claim to the world's confidence or respect. When a University ceases altogether to fulfil this high calling, its days are numbered, and its decay and extinction are only a question of time. And here again let not anyone think that this matter is no concern of his. It is the concern of every one of us. An institution, be it never so great, is but a name, unless it includes the individuals who are members of it, and who work in it and for it. And in the long run the character of an institution is but the sum total of the characters of those who compose and conduct it. It is not impossible that some of you may live to see the day when this University will celebrate yet another fifty years of its existence. What the condition of the University will be then I know not. But this I know, and all of you should know, that what it will be will in no small measure depend upon the way in which each one of us, teacher or scholar, master or servant, does his duty to God and to his neighbour inside and outside these noble walls. It will be something, and perhaps a good deal, if each in his own sphere can hand on the work to

his successor better than he found it. It will be something—nay, certainly a good deal—if each one of us can help to keep up, or (if need be) begin and maintain, a healthy tradition of honest, steadfast work. Singleness of aim, resoluteness of heart, reliance on God alone (weak though they be in us) may achieve something which, however imperfect and incomplete, will prove imperishable.

“The world passeth away and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God shall abide for ever.”

Do you remember the words which come next after these in S. John’s wonderful Epistle? “Little children, it is the last time.” May not they also be very appropriate to some of us? This is the last of our Sunday evening services, at least for some months to come. God alone knows how many of us will be allowed to meet together again to worship Him in this College chapel. Some of you, perhaps, can almost count the hours which you have yet to spend here. Term after term has flown away, and now only days, or even hours, remain. There is much it may be that is dark in the past; there is much that is obscure in the future. Let, therefore, our prayer, our last prayer together, be for light, more light—light that may revive us, light that may unite us with God and with one another, light that may free us from the

darkness now and for ever. "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the Blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin."

## NOTE

The University of Durham celebrated its jubilee in 1882.

## X

### A PLEA FOR MISSIONS

“Then they said one to another, We do not well : this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace : if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us : now therefore come, that ye may go and tell the King’s household.”—2 KINGS vii. 9.

“When Jesus then lifted up His eyes, and saw a great company come unto Him, He saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat ?”—S. JOHN vi. 5.

THE relief of the city of Samaria from famine by the instrumentality of the four leprous men, and the feeding of the five thousand by the instrumentality of the lad with the five barley loaves and two fishes, have this much in common : in both cases a large multitude of men, women, and children, who are in want of food are unexpectedly and wonderfully supplied ; and in both cases the human agency which was instrumental to the relief of the great necessity mixed in the circumstances without any intention of contributing towards the relief. The lepers started from Samaria merely on the chance of saving their own lives, while the lad brought

the provisions, if not solely for his own use, at any rate without intention of sharing them with all.

We might, perhaps, go a little into detail, and compare the helplessness of Philip, when he is asked to suggest a remedy, with the helplessness of the King, when the mother whose son has been eaten appeals to him against the mother who refuses to fulfil her part of the horrible bargain ; or again, compare the want of faith on the part of the disciples, who asked Jesus to send the multitudes empty away, with the open scepticism of the Captain on whose hand the King leaned, and who scoffed at the prophecy of Elisha.

But, without going into such particulars, there is enough resemblance in the broad features of the two incidents to warrant us in coupling them together and treating them as teaching, in virtue of this resemblance, a similar lesson. Part of that lesson is the simple charge which the Baptist gave to the inquiring multitudes in the region round about Jordan : " He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none ; and he that hath food, let him do likewise."

The conduct of the two leprous men had not been of the noblest. They had left the beleaguered city with no thought of benefiting any but themselves. There was, perhaps, as much despondency as selfishness in this. They had so little expecta-

tion of being able to better their own condition, that it scarcely occurred to them to take into account the possibility of their being able to do anything for their starving countrymen. But this plea cannot be urged on their behalf after they have reached the deserted camp of the Syrians, and found themselves in the midst of untold quantities of food and booty. What would have been almost the first thought of a generous, or even of a humane mind? 'Here are the means of terminating cruel suffering on an enormous scale; of saving, it may be, many lives. Not an hour must be lost of so precious an opportunity. A handful or two to satisfy our own cravings and give us strength for the journey back again. A handful or two to take with us as evidence that our good tidings are true. And then let us hurry back to Samaria.'

But no such thought occurs to any one of the four. Their first thought is to enjoy their present good fortune. "They went into one tent and did eat and drink." Their next thought is to provide for similar good fortune in the future. "They carried thence silver, and gold, and raiment, and went and hid it." And their third thought is a repetition of the second. "They came back"—apparently from some place away from the camp—"and entered into another tent, and carried thence



also, and went and hid it." Then, and not till then, does the thought of the famishing inhabitants of Samaria begin to disturb them, and they think their selfish conduct open to criticism. "Then they said one to another, We do not well : this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace : if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us : now therefore come, that we may go and tell the King's household." Even then it is fear of punishment that may fall upon themselves, rather than sympathy with the protracted misery of the citizens, which moves them at last to take steps for the relief of Samaria. It is, perhaps, possible, that some idea of *Divine* retribution is in their minds. The God Who commanded them to bring back their enemy's ox or ass when they saw it going astray, would not leave them unpunished if they left multitudes of their brethren to starve, when it was easy to direct them to abundance of food. But it is more probable that they were thinking of what would happen to them if the people of Samaria afterwards discovered that they had been in the deserted camp of the Syrians, and had brought no word back to the city. Their departure from the gate was known, and, when next they were seen by any of those who knew them, one of the first questions would be as to where they had been,

and how they had escaped both famine and the sword.

It is surprising to us that any such motive as fear of punishment should have occurred to them ; and that they should single it out as *the* motive to appeal to in urging one another to perform a pressing and easy duty—a duty which to many men, even among those who are not specially benevolent, would have been at once a pride and a delight. No ; certainly the conduct of the four leprous men was not what one would call noble.

Shall we plead on their behalf that they had been made outcasts from society ? The law of Moses, which was often forgotten or ignored when it was inconvenient to remember and observe it, had been strictly enforced against them, because here it had the sanction of selfish fear. Men who were not afraid to neglect festivals and offerings, or even to go after strange gods, could be very punctilious about excluding from their gates such loathsome and horrible objects as lepers. What had society done for these four miserable men, that they should at once think of the miseries of society as soon as they came from a piece of unexpected good fortune, in which others besides themselves might share ? It is true that some might have done better than they did ; but it is also true that some might have done worse. Some, either

through brutal indifference, or in bitter resentment against those who had cast them out, might have gone their way, and left the famine-stricken city to take its chance.

We know too little about the lad who was allowed to be instrumental in supplying the needs of the five thousand, to be able to say with confidence what his own attitude towards those needs was. But the Apostles assume that his loaves and fishes are at Christ's disposal; and, in the absence of anything to the contrary in the Gospels, we may reasonably suppose that his action was a contrast rather than a parallel to that of the four lepers, and that he joyfully embraced the opportunity of becoming an instrument for a widespread blessing. It is allowable to picture his amazement and pride as he saw his small store multiplied into a banquet for thousands of hungry people.

We like to think that we ourselves would have done as much as that, had we been placed in similar circumstances; that we should at any rate have done better than the lepers from the gate of Samaria.

Seeing that we *are* in similar circumstances, it is perhaps more profitable to inquire how, as a matter of fact, we are acting.

Like the lad on the mountain-side at Bethsaida Julias, and like those four in the deserted camp of

the Syrians, we have been entrusted with a great deal more than suffices for our own present needs. Like that lad, and like those lepers, we have within reach of us multitudes who are fainting for lack of that which we possess in such abundance; some of whom are hungering for it, while others have long since reached that stage when men cease to feel their own needs. "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord: and they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it."

Is not this Scripture more than fulfilled in our ears this day? The bitter cry of thousands in our great towns, who, although living in the midst of Christians, know nothing of the blessings which Christians and Christians alone enjoy, has been heard by all of us. The still more bitter silence of unknown millions in Africa and Asia, who have not so much as heard of Christ, has at times at least been felt by us. And with what results?

There is much no doubt that is encouraging and inspiring in what is being done in missionary efforts both at home and abroad. Nevertheless, it is still sadly true that the large majority of

Christians feel only slightly and fitfully, or even not at all, their heavy responsibilities in this matter, whether with regard to the heathen at their doors, or the heathen out of sight, where, "behind the mountains also there are people."

Some of you know that instructive Swiss proverb. It had its origin no doubt in mountain valleys, in which the villagers see little of the rest of the world at any time, and during the winter months are almost entirely cut off from even the rest of their own countrymen. Such persons find it good to remind themselves from time to time that they are not the whole of mankind, that their ideas are not the sole measure of what is right and proper, and that the few hundreds whom they sometimes meet are not the only men, women, and children, who have a claim upon their thoughts, and sympathy, and prayers. "Behind the mountains also there are people."

It may seem to us that such a proverb would be quite out of place among ourselves. *We* live in centres which attract many visitors at all times of the year and from many parts of the globe. We ourselves are constantly moving about, sometimes far beyond the limits of our own country, and see millions of faces, belonging to a score of different nationalities, in the course of a single year. We do not need to remind ourselves that

the few thousands whom we see around us day by day in our own homes do not constitute the whole of the human race.

Taken quite literally, that statement is no doubt true; but, as regards the spirit of it, it perhaps contains far more falsehood than truth. The fraction of mankind known to the inhabitants of a mountain valley is so small that even the most ignorant villager is not likely to forget that it *is* only a small fraction. The fraction with which we are conversant is comparatively so large that we are in danger, not merely of sometimes forgetting, but of never once trying to realize, how enormous is the fraction with which we are not conversant—aye, of which we have never so much as heard. And, while that is the case, how can we feel the claims which these unknown millions have upon us, claims which are none the less real because we do *not* feel them? We, too, need the warning of the dalesman's proverb, "Behind the mountains also there are people."

And it may, perhaps, be doubted whether a special warning is not needed for those who are in the fullest enjoyment of spiritual advantages. The Parable of Dives and Lazarus may be as true of religious luxuries as of material ones. Some of us, perhaps, even when we are planning a few weeks' holiday, make careful inquiry beforehand

as to the *kind* of Church services which we are likely to find along the line of route, or at the final resting-place, if there is to be such, and shape our plans according to the information that we may receive. And some of us are very fastidious about such things, and think it a serious drawback if we cannot have much the same kind of services as we are used to at home on the Sundays and holy days during our travels. There is no harm in all this care; but is it those of us who are most dainty about our own spiritual food that realize most strongly the wants of those who lack even the crumbs of our abundant diet, and that are most perseveringly in earnest about getting those wants supplied?

There are times when one feels sorely in doubt whether one really does *believe* that Christianity is what we proclaim it to be, and what in our better moments we know it to be—the one thing which can allay the smart, and cure the wounds, of *sin*; the one thing which, both for those who are taken and for those who are left, can give real consolation in *death*. And one has these doubts because one finds oneself so cold and unenthusiastic about imparting this priceless boon to others, and this although one has had such ample opportunity of appreciating the boon in all its fulness.

The four lepers at least knew what the food



and treasure, which they had acquired without effort, was to themselves, and from that they measured its value to others. We have so little consideration for what the *loss* of spiritual food and treasure means to others that one cannot avoid misgivings as to whether there is any true appreciation of what the *possession* of them means to ourselves. We have the key of eternal life. Can we be entering in ourselves when we take so little trouble that others may enter along with us? Supposing that we saw a group of physicians who confidently and constantly asserted that they were in possession of a simple remedy, of universal application, which would absolutely cure consumption and cancer, and yet saw these men very apathetic about applying the remedy, and allowing numbers of people within easy reach of their doors to die in the protracted suffering which these two terrible scourges commonly inflict. Should we not think that these men were either among the most heartless in their profession, or else not really holding in very high estimation the remedy which they professed to believe in as infallible? And ought we to be surprised or indignant when we find that unbelievers apply much the same kind of arguments to ourselves?

We are an impatient generation, and are ever wanting to see results, and it is no uncommon

thing for those who do nothing for mission work at home or abroad to taunt those who *are* striving to get something accomplished with the poverty-stricken appearance of the visible results. When all due allowance has been made for exaggerations and too favourable estimates, there still remains in many cases such a residuum of indisputable facts as may well inspire us with hope and thankfulness, so greatly in excess of sober expectation has been the clearly ascertained and well-established success. But let us assume for the moment that the most pessimistic estimates of what has been accomplished by Christian effort are correct, then our obligation to hasten to make known the good tidings is not diminished one iota. The whole principle of measuring our obligations by visible results is an erroneous one. What have the successes or failures of others to do with our duties? It is God Who gives the increase, and, if it pleases Him to withhold, not only all *signs* of increase, but the increase itself, the charge given to all of us, "Give *ye* them to eat," remains as imperative as ever. It will be no shame to us to have failed to feed even one hungry soul if only we have done what we could. It will be something worse than shame if, because others seem to have failed, we do not even make the attempt, or if, because our first and second efforts appear to

have been fruitless, we now cease to try. At the Day of Judgment we shall be asked not, "How many souls have you rescued from starvation?" but, "What have you done to feed them? You, who have had such rich provision made for your own spiritual necessities, what have you bestowed in money, in work, in thought, in prayer, in order to bring the Bread of Life within the reach and appreciation of those who as yet either cannot or will not receive it?"

"Now therefore come, let us go and tell the King's household." *That* is the better and the nobler motive. It is the King's household that needs our help. It is the King's household that we have the opportunity of succouring. Here is an occasion for exhibiting our loyalty, our reverence, and our affection. These heathen are subjects of the same King Whom we acknowledge and profess to obey and love; Whom they cannot acknowledge, because they do not know Him. They *ought* to be His servants, for they *are* His sons; His sons by creation; His sons also by redemption. He knows them all by name; but as yet they know not Him. It is this strange alienation that we are commissioned to bring to an end; that His house may be filled with welcome guests, and that they may be filled with heavenly food.

"This day is a day of good tidings." Let us

try to impress that great truth upon ourselves and others, and then all the rest will follow. When we have learned constantly to realize what the Gospel has been and is to ourselves, then either fear, or shame, or the love of man, or the love of God, will constrain us to "hold our peace" no longer. Our one thought will be, "Now therefore come, let us go and tell the King's household."

## XI

### THE MINISTRY OF ANGELS

“The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit.”—ACTS xxiii. 8.

“SADDUCEE” has long been a term of reproach. It is a convenient name with which to brand a man who does not share our religious convictions, especially if he seems to believe less than we do, and therefore, of course, less than he ought to believe; or if he appears to be less conspicuously in earnest about proclaiming his religious convictions than we think it right to be in proclaiming our own. It saves us all the trouble of finding out the truth about him, and confining ourselves strictly to that, to call him without qualification “a Sadducee.”

It is worth remembering that the sect of the Sadducees has been extinct for much more than a thousand years; that no writings of the Sadducees have come down to us; and that almost all that we know respecting them comes from their opponents. Let us grant—and it is a very great

deal to grant—that these opponents were fair-minded men, and really wished to give a true account of the conduct and beliefs of those from whom they differed so much ; still, prejudice would be certain to influence what they wrote. Which of us would be willing to accept a statement about ourselves made under such conditions ? No High-Churchman would like to be judged by the report which a Low-Churchman, however good and fair, would give of him ; nor would the Low-Churchman be ready to abide by the description which had been drawn by an honest but unsympathetic hand. If all that is told us to the discredit of Sadducees is true, we may be sure that a good deal that has never been told in praise of them is true also. And there is in the Gospels this significant fact in their favour—that Jesus Christ nowhere condemns them with the awful severity which He manifests towards their opponents, the Pharisees.

It is by no means certain in what sense and by what process of reasoning the Sadducees came to the conclusion that the existence of angels and spirits was an open question, and that they were quite at liberty to deny their existence. The Sadducees accepted the whole of the Old Testament, and, like other Jews, regarded the five books of Moses with special reverence ; and throughout

the Old Testament the existence of mysterious spiritual beings, working God's will among the children of men, and upon rare occasions appearing in a visible form to them, seems to be very plainly taught. How the Sadducees evaded this apparently very evident fact we do not at all know; but perhaps our own experience can show us how easy it is, without in so many words contradicting the plain teaching of the Bible, to go on habitually both in thought and conduct as if the teaching of the Bible respecting the unseen powers of good and evil were altogether untrue. How many of us ever make any serious attempt to realize that what Scripture tells us about angels and spirits is plain matter of fact, and as much a matter of fact to-day as it was when Apostles and Prophets were working among mankind? Most of us persistently live as if the world which we see all around us with our bodily eyes were everything. We rarely make any effort to grasp the truth, that there is not only a world to come, another life after death, but a mystical world in the midst of which we are at this very moment living and moving, as real as our own friends and homes, although we take no account of it. Few of us ever bring it home to ourselves that all around us, as we work, or sport, or sleep, or pray, there are moving powerful beings, the messengers—some of



them from Heaven, and others from hell. This thought would be full of solemnity and awe, even if these beings had nothing to do with us and took no notice of us. But when we know that they are deeply interested in us and our conduct, and that they are exercising their mysterious powers, some on our side and some against us, then the thought might be expected to become almost overwhelming.

And yet, although we do know this, how little impression it makes upon us. Probably very few persons, excepting very young children, remember it at all frequently. To the rest of us angels and spirits are little more than the fairies and giants of our childhood. Now and then our thoughts wander back to them in solemn and quiet moments; but even then rather as poetic fancies than as sure and certain facts. Month by month we say with the Psalmist, "Praise the Lord, ye angels of His, ye servants of His that do His pleasure"; and at times we sing, "O ye angels of the Lord, bless ye the Lord, praise Him and magnify Him for ever." When we use such language, do we realize that we are addressing living beings, as real as we are, our fellow-creatures and our fellow-servants before God? In the Communion Service, when we say, "Therefore with angels and archangels we praise and magnify Thy glorious Name," do we realize

that there is a heavenly host joining with us at that very moment in adoring the Blessed Trinity? In the *Te Deum* do we consider that we are using the language, not of poetry but of fact, when we sing, "To Thee all angels cry aloud, the heavens, and all the powers therein"?

We are far too apt to think that the world of which the Bible tells us is not our world, and that God now governs the universe in quite a different way from that which He followed in dealing with those who lived before the birth of Christ and with the first generation of Christians. We seem almost to believe that the Divine machinery becomes disordered and obsolete, and that our age requires new means of government. Ministering spirits seem to be suitable to Patriarchs, Prophets, and Apostles, but not to the twentieth century. And this hard and cold ignoring of the unseen world is not helpful to us. It would be better for us if we thought more often of the angels who are ceaselessly ascending and descending upon the children of men; if we remembered that those holy beings who ministered to Christ after His temptation are ready to refresh and comfort us after ours; if we believed that the one who strengthened Him in His agony is at hand with many of his fellows to bring strength to us; and that those who rolled away the stone and proclaimed His Resurrection

are at hand to remove our difficulties and to bring us glad tidings of great joy. God's promise still holds good, that He "will give His angels charge over us to keep us in all our ways."

A lively faith in the reality of angels and spirits, both good and evil, would help to make us more humble. Man occupies a high place in the scale of creation; but there are beings far higher, the sight of whom, when sight has been permitted, has made men swoon for fear and become as dead. And not only more humble, but more full of holy fear; for we should more often bear in mind that "our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."

But a living belief in the unseen world would also inspire us with much comfort and hope. Although God has legions of these holy beings to worship Him, and love Him, and receive His love, yet He thinks of each one of His sinful creatures here on earth, and appoints them to watch over us. And how greatly they sympathize with our struggles against sin we know well, because there is joy in the presence of them all over one sinner that repenteth. Even the thought of evil spirits, ever on the watch to lead us into sin, terrible as it

is, is not without its consolation. When horrible thoughts come into our minds, and we are assailed by temptations which it would be misery to have to put into words and tell to others, is it not a comfort to remember that these fiery darts are not part of ourselves and do not proceed from ourselves, but are hurled at us from the outside, and are thrown into the citadel of our souls by some foul invisible foe? To know the source whence such troubles come not only makes us more watchful, but also makes us more cheerful under the trial.

Lastly, the habit of realizing the existence of angels and spirits all around us might give us increased hatred of sin. There is many an habitual and hardened sinner who is most conscious of the degradation into which he has brought himself, and is able most successfully to fight against it, when he is in the company of little children, especially if they are his own. The drunkard will sometimes postpone the gratification of his appetite, and the blasphemer will sometimes check his foul language, rather than proclaim himself in the presence of little children as the debased creature that he is, and rather than shock their eyes and ears with what they must otherwise hear and see. If the presence of others, and especially of children, can thus act as a very real help against temptation,

assuredly a constant belief that we are always in the presence of beings far holier than the most innocent child, and far more certain to be shocked and pained by our wrongdoing, would sometimes help us to resist where now we give way. The thought that angels must witness our wicked acts, angels must hear our intemperate words, angels can read our evil thoughts, is a defence that we might use far more frequently and effectively than we do in the hour of temptation. By constantly recognizing the presence of angels all around us here, we shall become familiar with it, and shall be made more fit for intercourse with them hereafter. We shall not meet them as awful strangers, but as tried and loved friends. They have one last duty to perform towards all of us, for in the great harvest the reapers are the angels. God grant that, when our turn comes, we may not be among those who are to be bound in bundles for the fire, but may be gathered as good grain into the Father's barn.

## XII

### THE JOY OF ANGELS

"There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."—S. LUKE xv. 10.

THESE words occur in the Parable of the Lost Piece of Money, which is one of the many parables that are recorded by S. Luke alone. The 15th chapter consists of a trilogy of parables which all teach the same lesson, although from different points of view, and with a wide difference of details, some of which are merely the framework of the parable, while others are full of meaning.

The Pharisees and Scribes had just been finding fault with our Lord, because He readily allowed the publicans and sinners (that is, the chief outcasts of society) to draw near to Him to hear Him. They murmured against Him, as if it were an amazing and a scandalous thing that He should receive sinners and eat with them. They regarded contact and intimacy with such persons as not only a social disgrace, but a moral contamination. He replies to them with the triplet of parables

which is so familiar to us—of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Piece of Money, and the Lost Son. They all teach how different the Divine view of sinners is from that of Pharisees and Scribes. They show, not only how infinitely precious in God's sight are *masses* of sinners when they crowd round to listen to Christ's healing words, but how worthy of the tenderest and most patient solicitude is *every individual* sinning soul ; and, above all, how sure of a generous and joyous welcome is every sinner who returns to God. These Scribes and Pharisees were uttering complaints over work which would make angels rejoice and add to the joys of Heaven. They had blamed Jesus Christ for giving a welcome to sinners who came to listen to His teaching. So far from this being excessive tenderness, it was less than God Himself does in His dealings with sinners : He not only welcomes them when they come, He goes after them to bring them home to Himself.

From one point of view it is a matter for regret that our table of lessons divides this closely-connected triplet of parables, so that we have those of the Lost Sheep and Lost Piece of Money read on one day, and that of the Lost Son on another. Yet we can bear to have so immense and so blessed a lesson divided between two days ; and, moreover, the first two parables are much



more intimately related with one another than either of them is with the third. No parable can teach more than a portion of any great truth : and although even the first two parables are not quite identical in their meaning, yet on the whole *they* set forth the love and care with which the erring soul is sought for by the Lord, while that about the prodigal son shows the effect of all this upon the soul that is gone astray. In the one case we have God's share, in the other the sinner's own share, in the work of conversion. But all three contain the main lesson, called forth by the murmuring of the Pharisees, that the sight of even one returning sinner is a sight that gives joy to God and His angels. It matters not whether the lost one be one of two, or one of ten, or one of a hundred ; it is yearned for, and searched for, and toiled after with unfaltering patience and affection until it is found ; and the finding of it is the occasion of angelic and Divine rejoicing.

It matters not, moreover, what may have *caused* the sinner to go astray in the first instance. He may have erred through ignorance, or through the fault of others, or through his own depravity and deliberate rejection of what he knew to be good and safe, for the sake of what was perilous but pleasant. Still, if he turns again, he is sure of an affectionate welcome—nay, even if he has no mind

or no power to turn again, he will be sought after, and helped, and brought home.

And there *are* these three kinds of sinners. There are some who, like the silly sheep, go astray—they hardly know why or how. A little curiosity, or love of change, or heedlessness, takes them outside their habitual place of safety, and they are in a maze of temptations, and have yielded to them, before they have at all realized that anything is seriously amiss. And then they wander blindly on, deeper and deeper into the howling wilderness, committing one sin after another in utter aimlessness of purpose and helplessness of will. And as it was ignorance that led them astray in the first instance, so it is, in a large measure, ignorance that keeps them astray. They have lost themselves. They would at times gladly retrace their steps—terror at their present condition, even without any affection for their old innocent life, which perhaps still seems insipid and uninviting, is enough to make them do that; but they do not know *how* to retrace them. Perhaps now and then they *do* make some kind of effort. But they have lost their bearings, and get no nearer to the fold, until the Good Shepherd, far from thinking that what has been so long astray is lost for ever, or is not worth seeking; far from thinking that what is, after all, but a very

small fraction of His whole flock is a loss that matters little, goes Himself into the wilderness after that which is lost, *until He find it*.

And, again, there are others of whom it seems to be no more than the truth to say that they go astray, and remain astray, through the fault of others rather than their own. The piece of money did not lose itself. It was not its doing that it was allowed to roll out of sight into a filthy corner. It was not its doing that it remained there, becoming more and more tarnished and unlike anything precious, and becoming more and more covered over with dust and dirt. And there are poor sinners of whom much the same may be said. Through the fault of others, and not of themselves, they have (humanly speaking) never had a chance of being anything but wicked. From their childhood they have been exposed to the maximum of temptation, and have had the minimum of help wherewith to withstand it. They drifted into sin, and they remain in sin, because careless and heartless fellow-Christians have allowed them to slip away into the gutter, and then have left them to lie there.

Does this interpretation of the parable startle any of you? Examine it closely, and you will find it suggested by the very structure and wording of it. Why, in this parable alone of the three,

have we a woman as the chief actor? Is it not to warn us that, while the owner of the sheep is Christ, and the Father of the prodigal our Heavenly Father, the loser of the money is not to be understood as a Divine Person? And note again the difference of wording in each case respecting that which was lost and regained. There is no hint that the owner of the sheep was to blame for letting one of them stray, or that the father was to blame because his graceless son deserted him. The owner of the sheep goes after "that which is lost," not which *he* had lost; and he asks his friends to rejoice with him, "for I have found my sheep which *was* lost," not "which *I* had lost." And so also says the father: "This my son was dead and is alive again, and *was* lost, and is found." Even in the overflowing tenderness with which he welcomes back the prodigal he never for a moment suggests, "Perhaps I was somewhat to blame, it was my mismanagement that made him wish to go away." But it is otherwise with the woman. "Rejoice with me, for I have found *the* piece which *I* had lost." There are two points there. The money is not her own: she says "*the* piece," not "*my* piece." And the fault *is* her own. The money did not go astray: she lost it.

The woman does not represent either God, or Jesus Christ, or the Divine Wisdom. Rather,

she is the Church—*i.e.*, the whole body of Christians, who, by their own evil lives, and neglect, and sloth, have brought things to such a pass that, even in Christian countries, there are thousands who come into the world whose surroundings are such, and whose education is such, that they cannot help growing up blasphemous, and intemperate, and sensual. And let us not think that the awful guilt of all this lies upon other Christians, but not at all upon ourselves. Every sin that we have committed, and every duty that we have shirked, has contributed its quota to swell the complex mass of causes which produces this terrible result. How often do we pray, either in this place or elsewhere, for those lost ones who are lying in the dirt, when they ought to be shining in God's treasure-house? How much do we give of our substance to the many excellent agencies which are at work for reclaiming them, most of which are sorely crippled for want of funds? And if we have little time and less money to contribute towards this work, are we generous with sympathy and encouragement towards those who have taken upon themselves this blessed, but often most disheartening, labour?

Lastly, there are others that go astray, neither through ignorance nor through the fault of others,

but (like the prodigal son) with their eyes open and of deliberate choice. They know their Heavenly Father, and the blessings which He abundantly bestows upon them under His own immediate care. But His commandments, which are not grievous, they find irksome, and the peaceful duties of His household they find monotonous. They long for more freedom, or what they consider such ; they wish "to see life," as they say, and have their share of such pleasures as the world has to offer. And when sufficient temptation offers, they take the fatal step, not hastily but of purpose, which has been slowly forming, and is now set. They bid farewell to the life of innocence, and go forth on the road which leads, as they try to hope, towards happiness, but in reality towards eternal loss.

To which of these three classes of sinners do we belong? Can we honestly plead that we have generally sinned through ignorance, or through the fault of other people? Has it not been—is it not still—through our own want of love for our Heavenly Father, and our deliberate preference of our will to His? But that is not the main lesson brought before us in the blessed group of parables preserved for the healing of our souls by the beloved physician, S. Luke. The main lesson is this: that, however we have been in-

duced to stray, and however grievously we have gone astray, the Divine Love has never ceased to go after us; and that, whenever we turn again, even until seven hundred times seven, if only our turning be hearty and real, we are sure of a loving welcome.

“There is” still “joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.”

There is still One Who, in the Sacrament which He has ordained, “receiveth sinners and eateth with them.”



## CHAPTER XIII

### HEAVENLY WISDOM

“ But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without variance, without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for them that make peace.”—S. JAMES iii. 17, 18.

AT the beginning of his Epistle S. James exhorts those of his readers who feel their lack of wisdom to pray for it. Wisdom is one of those good and perfect gifts from above, which come down from the Father of lights, Who giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not. In the verses before us he states in a few clear, pregnant words what the characteristics of this heavenly gift of wisdom are. In both passages he probably had in his mind, and perhaps wished to suggest to his readers, well-known utterances on the same subject in the Books of Proverbs, Ecclesiasticus, and Wisdom.

In the Book of Proverbs we read: “ My son, if thou cry after discernment, and lift up thy voice for understanding; if thou seek her as silver, and

search for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord giveth wisdom; out of His mouth cometh knowledge and understanding" (ii. 3-6). Again in the magnificent "Praise of Wisdom" in the 24th chapter of Ecclesiasticus, Wisdom is made to tell her own glories thus: "I came forth from the mouth of the most High, and covered the earth like a cloud. . . . Then the Creator of all things gave me a commandment, and He that created me caused my tabernacle to rest, and said, Let thy dwelling be in Jacob, and thine inheritance in Israel." And in the Book of Wisdom Solomon is made to say of her: "She is the breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation from the glory of the Almighty: therefore doth no defiled thing fall into her. For she is the effulgence of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God, and the image of His goodness" (vii. 25, 26).

Three thoughts are conspicuous in these passages. Wisdom originates with God. It is consequently pure and glorious. God bestows it on His people. These thoughts reappear in S. James, and to them he adds a fourth, which scarcely appears in the earlier writers. Wisdom is "peaceable, gentle, easy to be intreated, full

of mercy and good fruits." In Proverbs we do indeed read that "all her paths are peace" (iii. 17); but the thought is not followed up. It does not seem to occur to the son of Sirach, and not one of the twenty-one epithets which the writer of the Book of Wisdom piles up in praise of this heavenly gift (vii. 22, 23) touches upon its peaceable and placable nature. It was left to the Gospel to teach, both by the example of Christ and by the words of His Apostles, how inevitably the Divine wisdom produces, in those who possess it, gentleness, self-repression, and peace.

"The wisdom that is from above is *first* pure, *then* peaceable." The "first" and the "then" may be seriously misunderstood. S. James does *not* mean that the heavenly wisdom cannot be peaceable until all its surroundings have been made pure from whatever would oppose or contradict it. He does *not* mean that the wise Christian will first free himself from the society of all whom he believes to be in error, and then, but not till then, will be peaceable and gentle—that is, that Wisdom will denounce what seems to contradict it wherever she meets it, but will become easy to be entreated as soon as contradiction has ceased.

This interpretation does violence to the context, and makes S. James teach the very opposite of

what the whole paragraph says plainly enough. It tries to enlist him on the side of partisanship and persecution at the very moment when he is pleading most earnestly against them. He is stating a logical order, and not a chronological one, when he declares that true wisdom is "*first* pure, *then* peaceable." In its inmost nature it is pure; among its various manifestations are the beneficent qualities which follow the "then." If there were no one to be gentle to, no one coming to entreat, no one needing mercy, the wisdom from above would still be pure; therefore this characteristic comes first.

But what does this purity mean? Certainly it must not be understood in the limited signification of chastity. The word "sensual," applied in the preceding verses to the wisdom from below, does not mean unchaste, but living wholly in the world of sense; and the purity of the heavenly wisdom does not consist merely in victory over temptations of the flesh, but in freedom from worldly and low motives. Its aim is that truth should prevail, and it condescends to no ignoble arts in prosecuting this aim. Contradiction does not ruffle it, and hostility does not provoke it to retaliate, because its motives are thoroughly disinterested and pure. Thus its peaceable and placable qualities flow out of its purity. It is

because the man who is inspired with it has no ulterior selfish ends to serve, that he is gentle, sympathetic, and considerate towards those who oppose him. He strives, not for victory over his opponents, but for truth both for himself and for them, and he knows what it costs to arrive at truth.

We have a noble illustration of this temper in some of the opening passages of S. Augustine's treatise against the so-called Fundamental Letter of Manichæus. He says:

“ My prayer to the one true God Almighty has been and is, that in refuting and disproving the heresy of you, Manichæans, to which you adhere perchance more through thoughtlessness than evil intent, He would give me a mind composed and tranquil, and aiming rather at your amendment than your discomfiture. . . . Let those rage against you who know not with what toil truth is found, and how difficult it is to avoid errors. . . . Let those rage against you who know not with how great difficulty the eye of the inner man is made whole, so that it can behold its Sun. . . . Let those rage against you who know not with what sighs and groans it is made possible, in however small a degree, to comprehend God. Finally, let those rage against you who have never been deceived by such an error as that

whereby they see you deceived. . . . Let neither of us say that he has already found the truth. Let us seek it as if it were unknown to us both. For it can be sought for with zeal and unanimity, only if there be no rash assumption that it has been found and is known."

These words are all the more impressive when we remember that Augustine himself had been a Manichæan, and that converts are usually most bitter against those beliefs from which they have been converted.

Listen to another passage to the same effect, but in a somewhat different key, from a critical writer of our own day, whose collected essays are now being widely read in England. He tells us, in a review of the life of Bishop Warburton, that "by an intellect which is habitually filled with the wisdom which is from Heaven in all its length and breadth, 'objections' against religion are perceived at once to proceed from imperfect apprehension. Such an intellect cannot rage against those who give words to such objections. It sees that the objectors do but intimate the partial character of their own knowledge" (Mark Pattison, *Essays*, ii. 163).

It will be observed that, while the writer just quoted speaks of the *intellect*, S. James speaks of the *heart*. The difference is not accidental: it is

significant of a difference in the point of view. The modern view of wisdom is that it is a matter which mainly consists in the strengthening and enriching of the intellectual powers. Increase of capacity for acquiring and retaining knowledge; increase in the possession of knowledge; this is what is meant by growth in wisdom. And by knowledge is meant acquaintance with the nature and history of man, and with the nature and history of the universe: all which is the sphere of the intellect rather than of the heart. The purification and development of the moral powers, if not absolutely excluded, is left in the background, and almost out of sight. What S. James says here is, indeed, fully admitted: the highest wisdom keeps a man from the bitterness of party spirit. But why? Because his superior intelligence and information tell him that the opposition of those who dissent from him is the result of ignorance, which is remedied, not by invective, but by instruction. S. James does not dissent from this view, but he enlarges it. There are other reasons why the truly wise man does not rail at others, or try to browbeat them into silence. Because, while he abhors folly, he loves the fool, and would win him over from his foolish ways; because he desires, not only to impart knowledge, but to increase virtue; and because



he knows that strife means confusion, while gentleness is the parent of peace.

The Scriptural view of wisdom does not contradict the modern one, but it is taken from the other side. Among the gifts bestowed at Pentecost the quickening of the moral and spiritual powers is conspicuous, while intellectual advancement is in the background or out of sight. There is nothing in the teaching of Christ or of His Apostles that is hostile to intellectual progress; but neither by His example, nor by the directions which His disciples received or delivered, do we find that culture was regarded as part of, or necessary to, the Gospel. Neither Christ, nor any one of His immediate followers, came forward as a great promoter of intellectual progress. Why is this?

It might be a sufficient answer to say that, valuable as such work would have been, there was much more serious and important work to be done. To convert men from sin to righteousness was far more urgent than to improve their minds. But there is more to be said than this. That perverse generation had to "turn and become as little children" before it could enter into the kingdom of Heaven; and to develop a man's intellectual powers is not always the best way to make him "humble himself as a little child." Increase of

knowledge may make a Newton feel like a child picking up pebbles on the shore of truth, but it is apt to make "the natural man" less childlike. And for none of us is cultivation of the intellect so pressing a duty as cultivation of the heart. "To know all mysteries and all knowledge" is as nothing compared with charity. Man's moral nature certainly suffered, and ruinously suffered, at the Fall. It is not so certain that his intellectual nature suffered also. If it did, it suffered *through* the moral nature, because the depraved heart depraved the brain. If, therefore, loss of innocence has entailed a loss of mental capacity, then the wound inflicted on the moral nature must be healed in the same way. First purify the heart and regenerate the will, and then the recovery of intellect will follow in due course. It is easy to reach the intellect through the heart; and this is what the wisdom which is from above aims at doing. If we begin with the intellect, we shall very likely end there; and in that case the man is not raised from his degradation, but equipped with additional powers of mischief.

Let us bear this in mind when we consider the claims of that General Diocesan Fund, the needs of which are by our Bishop's desire being placed before the diocese in many churches to-day. Some of you gave your thank-offerings to it on Ascension

Day. But it is permanent subscriptions rather than casual donations that are needed. Would you widen the influence of that wisdom from above of which the season of Pentecost reminds us so impressively? You can hardly do so more effectually than by giving steady support to a fund, the main object of which is to supply the spiritual, moral, and intellectual needs in the teeming population all around us. S. James tells us that the heavenly wisdom is not only peaceable and gentle, but "full of mercy and good works"; and thus, as so often, he gives us a practical test wherewith to try ourselves. Is our wisdom from above or from below? Just as we have no reason to rejoice in a faith which does not clothe the naked, and feed the hungry, and offer of its best to God; nor in a tongue which blesses God while it rails at men; so we may doubt the heavenly character of a wisdom which refuses to visit the fatherless in their affliction, or to aid in healing the moral plague-spots of the world.

#### NOTE

This sermon is mainly an abbreviation of chap. xvii. in the writer's commentary on the Epistles of S. James and S. Jude in the *Expositor's Bible*, edited by Dr. W. Robertson Nicoll, and published by Messrs. Hodder and Stoughton, who kindly allow this adaptation of the chapter to be published here.

## XIV

### AN ORDINATION SERMON

“I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.”—S. JOHN xvi. 12.

THERE are two portions of the New Testament to which one who holds office in Christ's Church naturally goes for special guidance in the difficult work of the ministry. One of them is the Pastoral Epistles of S. Paul, the other is those farewell discourses to the disciples which our Lord delivered a few hours before He surrendered Himself to His enemies. In the one, the Apostle of the Gentiles teaches his two chief disciples and delegates, and through them Christian ministers throughout all ages, on what principles they are to act as overseers of the flock in a variety of circumstances. In the other, the Master Himself instructs His Apostles, and through them all Christendom, by teaching them how and what to teach. And, while He instructs, He invests with authority and power—the power to understand better what He has already shown to them; the

power to receive what He has not yet shown to them; and the authority to pass it on to others with ceaselessly expanding productiveness and adaptability. For what they pass on is not their own, but the whole truth of Christ in all its inexhaustible details, as they are revealed to the Churches, through the experience of Christians, and by the perpetual illumination of the Holy Spirit. The words of the text, as we might expect from their import, come near the close of these farewell discourses. Soon after they were spoken Jesus ceased to address the Apostles, and began His High-priestly prayer to His Heavenly Father, for Himself, for His disciples, and for all of us who have been enabled to believe on Him through their word.

“I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.”

When we look back upon any last interview that we have had with one or more, even where we knew beforehand that it would be a last interview, and that the opportunity of speaking face to face would never return in this world, how much is found to have been left unsaid! Things that we ought to have said, meant to have said, and yet after all did not say, either because there was no time for such words, or because the words would not come. It would be a grave mistake to

explain this utterance of Jesus Christ by any such commonplace considerations. He knew to the moment how much time was at His disposal for these last words, and how much time was necessary in order that everything that could with profit be said might be said in the best way. Nothing was hurried, nothing was forgotten. No human emotion was allowed to interfere with these gentle, but indelible strokes, which put the finishing touch to the work of a Saviour who had not yet died and risen again. Whatever was omitted was deliberately omitted, because the time for saying it had not yet come. He says to the faithful eleven that they are His friends, and that He gives them the whole of a friend's confidence without stint or reservation. But it would be useless to tell them at once what they could not at present understand. It would be cruel to communicate truths which now would only crush them. When conditions are present (and they will come) in which they can hear without perplexity or dismay, they will be led, by a Guide that cannot err, into the new and boundless territory of the Truth "that passeth knowledge."

"But ye cannot bear them now." Perhaps there is no other passage in the whole of these marvellous discourses in which Jesus Christ appears more conspicuously as the great Educator of His

ministers, as the Shepherd of shepherds, revealing to them in tender consideration the principle on which He deals with them, and will deal with them; and the principle on which they must be ready to carry on His work in their own hearts and in the hearts of others. On this night of the Last Supper He has said things which He would not have said at the marriage-feast in Cana, nor at the feeding of the five thousand on the heights above the lake; and there are yet many things which He will not say even now. And the principle throughout is the same. He withholds, not because He lacks the desire to communicate, not because He wills to reserve *meum secretum mihi*; but because as yet these things cannot be told with profit—cannot be told without loss to the cause of truth and damage to those who hear prematurely.

It was no new principle. We can trace it in God's dealings with the human race, and especially with the Chosen People throughout the whole of the Old Testament. To each age, to each nation, to each form of civilization and religion, as their typical characteristics are brought out and placed before us in those lifelike descriptions by known and unknown writers and selectors, we can hear the Divine maxim being whispered in all its fatherly tenderness, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." Does it



perplex us that even among those who knew most about God so much debasement and ignorance was tolerated ; so many saving truths, which to us seem quite obvious, in science, in morality, and in religion, were withheld ? Let us rest assured that it was in no niggardly, grudging spirit that the human race was kept for generations from the fruition of these ennobling gifts, but because to mankind at that early stage of progress such gifts would not have been ennobling. Throughout the Bible, and throughout all human history, there are silences, which to those who contemplate them aright are as instructive as the utterances which they separate and throw into relief. In the whole process of revelation, the God Who reveals is also a God Who hides Himself. And it is thus that a domain is provided in which the believer can test the strength of his own confidence in God. " Though He slay me," and slay me in the dark, " yet will I trust in Him."

" I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." You will hardly need to be reminded that this was the principle upon which the Apostles acted in dealing with their converts. S. Paul writes to the factious Corinthians, who by their conduct had proved themselves to be still " babes in Christ," " I fed you with milk, not with meat ; for ye were not yet able to bear

it : nay, not even now are ye able ; for ye are yet carnal " (1 Cor. iii. 2, 3)—words which are little more than a paraphrase of the very words which we are now considering. And in a still sadder tone the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews writes to them that he has much to say respecting Christ, but they "are become dull of hearing. For when by reason of the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need again that someone teach you the rudiments of the first principles of the oracles of God ; and are become such as have need of milk and not of solid food " (v. 11, 12). The Corinthians, even more than the Apostles on the eve of the Passion, were still in the infancy of the spiritual life. The Hebrews were far worse. They had not merely failed to make reasonable progress ; they had by their neglect gone back to childishness ; and, at a time when they ought to have been instructing others, they had the very alphabet of Christianity to learn again themselves. But in all these cases (which are but specimens of a common state of things) unwelcome facts cannot be remedied by ignoring them. If those with whom the teacher has to deal are only at the stage of childhood, it is worse than useless to treat them as adults and give them food, which (however excellent in itself) will be no food to them.

Do you need to be reminded that this merciful principle, of which God is constantly giving us illustrations in His dealings with mankind, which Christ has formulated for us, and which His Apostles have reiterated when speaking in His Name, is one which *everyone is bound to keep carefully before him when he accepts the responsible office of instructing others in the faith* and “guiding their feet into the way of peace”? If these few words which I am desired to address to you this morning have the effect of impressing this great truth a little more strongly upon the minds of some, they will not have been altogether thrown away. The evils which are “wrought by want of thought” are among the most tragic things in human life: not merely because nearly all of them might, without great difficulty, have been prevented; but because so many of them are produced with the very best intentions. Men wish to do good, and purpose to do good; and then, through insufficient consideration of the circumstances, they say or do exactly the wrong thing, which they might have known to be the wrong thing if they had but remembered the kind of persons with whom they were dealing. This is a form of evil to which we all of us contribute largely; but probably the largest contributors are generally the impulsive and the enthusiastic; and that for the

most part means the inexperienced and the young. It is a form of evil against which we need to be specially on our guard at the present time, when exaggeration and over-statement are part of the stock-in-trade of a very large number of those who endeavour to get the ear of the public. Men deliberately say a great deal more than they mean, in the expectation that they will thereby induce some of their audience to accept half of what they say. They fling out startling paradoxes, or state what is unquestionably true in a way calculated to shock and offend, in order (as they say) "to rouse the public conscience." Is it not manifest that, while some may thus possibly be led to recognize the element of truth which underlies this reckless talk, many more recognize nothing but the recklessness, and thus are alienated from the truth, perhaps for ever? Far less harm is done by offering to the uninstructed less of the truth than they might have accepted, than by forcing upon them a great deal more than they are at present at all likely to welcome.

It is an error of the same kind, when we have gained a hold upon those whom we desire to influence for their welfare, to try to hurry them on too fast. We live in an impatient age, and most of us give way to the temptation of trying to compress what of necessity must be a long and

anxious process into a moderate compass of time. Evils which have been the growth of centuries cannot be undone in a generation, and a life which is to last throughout eternity cannot be brought to perfection in a year. But we are so impressed with the many things that there is need to say, that we forget to ask the question whether men can bear them now. We are so full of the immeasurable distance which separates the highest Christian attainment of our time from the depth of degradation in which the masses lie, and even from the low level of moral inefficiency at which multitudes of professing Christians are content to remain, that we are slow to recognize the fact that this great distance has been in a large measure created and made permanent by the faulty, hasty, and even harsh methods which have been adopted for raising those who lie so low. It was with the instincts of a true shepherd that Jacob pleaded with his impulsive brother: "If they overdrive them one day, all the flocks will die" (Gen. xxxiii. 13). And it is of the Divine Shepherd that it is written, "He will gently lead those that are with young." You will have to deal with heated brains, teeming with crude conceptions; with heaving breasts, panting with half-formed aspirations; with throbbing hearts, bursting with just and unjust indignations. Be content to lead

gently; not to enjoin or expect too much; not to be hard upon defects or excesses. A light hand will be welcomed where a heavy hand would be dashed aside.

“I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.” In conclusion, let us remember that this is the principle on which Christ is always dealing with each one of ourselves. At each stage of our spiritual progress He has always more things to reveal to us than we can at that moment bear. They are waiting for us, to be given with a bounteous hand, as soon as we are ready to receive them. It may be that during these last few weeks, or these last few solemn days, Christ has come to you in ways that you could not have understood and could not have welcomed a year or two ago. Pentecost did not complete this promised illumination for the Apostles, and your Ordination will not close it for you. Remember that it is no less than “all the truth” into which He has promised that the Paraclete shall guide you, and that, therefore, there are no limits to the revelations of the Divine Will which loyal, willing hearts may win. These revelations are made “by divers portions and in divers manners”—not seldom by suffering. At times we may feel tempted to meet them with the cry, “This is a hard saying; who can hear it?”

But let us hold fast to the gracious assurance that at no moment will more be told to us than we are able to bear, and then our natural reluctance will give place to the loyal prayer, "Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth."



## XV

### THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

“His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it. . . . Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim.”—S. JOHN ii. 5, 7.

THE Festival of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary falls this year, as it commonly falls, in Lent, and in the more solemn portion of Lent. Perhaps at times we are inclined to regret this; for keeping fast and festival simultaneously appears to involve a contradiction such as Christ Himself pointed out when He asked the question, “Can ye make the sons of the bridechamber fast while the bridegroom is with them?” The fact that it is still Lent seems in a measure to spoil this great festival, and to detract somewhat from its joy. And yet, when we look a little more closely, the joy which the Feast of the Annunciation brings harmonizes very well with the sorrow which Lent ought to bring; and in this conjunction of festival with fast, we see the Christian Church doing what is so eminently natural (as Homer shows us in

that exquisite touch about Andromache)—“smiling through her tears.” We all of us have sinned grievously, and in Lent we confess and bewail our sin. And then comes the angel with his message of comfort, “God has given His Son to put away thy sin ; thou shalt not die.”

“His Mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it.” These are the last recorded words of the Virgin Mother. We hear of her on one or two subsequent occasions in the Gospel history, and with regard to one of these we are told something as to her wishes ; but this is the last occasion on which the words which she uttered have been preserved for us. It is worth while remarking that most of what we know respecting her words and acts is told us of the time before, or just after, her Divine Son was born. The sum total of what is told us in Scripture respecting her does not amount to very much, but far the larger portion of what is recorded refers to the time before, or immediately after, the Birth at Bethlehem.

It is not difficult to conjecture a reason for this. Her part in the history of man’s redemption was complete when the Saviour was born and reared ; and that is all which it concerns us to know. And we are told very little, indeed, as to the details of His rearing. It may be summed up in

a short sentence. He lived at Nazareth with Joseph and Mary, was subject to them, and was brought up as a carpenter.

It is quite in harmony with this reticence of Scripture respecting Christ's Mother from the time when He had ceased to be an infant, that so very little is recorded of the many things which she said to Him and to others. Just three such sayings have been preserved: two addressed to Him, and one addressed to the servants at the marriage feast. "Son, why hast Thou thus dealt with us? Behold, Thy father and I sought Thee sorrowing." That was in the temple at Jerusalem. The second was at Cana of Galilee. When the wine failed, the Mother of Jesus saith unto Him, "They have no wine." The third and last saying is the one which we are now considering; His Mother saith unto the servants: "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it."

And it is worth noting of these three recorded sayings since the infancy of her Divine Child, that the two which are addressed to Him are not such as to call forth from Him any words of sympathy or approval: rather the contrary. His reply to the first is an expression of surprise. He is astonished that Mary and Joseph had any need to *seek* for Him. They might have known where to find Him. "How is it that ye sought Me?

Wist ye not that I must be in My Father's house?" His reply to the second utterance is still less a word of approval. He is now grown to manhood, and His public ministry as the Saviour of the world has begun. It is part of His work to rebuke what is amiss, and He has the right and authority to rebuke even His Mother. His reply to her this time is more than an expression of surprise. It implies that she has taken too much upon her; that she has interfered without sufficient reason and without right. She has spoken in a case in which she ought to have left everything to Him. "Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come." He knew, and she did not, when He could exercise His Divine power with the largest and best results in creating or confirming faith in those who witnessed the manifestation of it. It was "not for her to know times or seasons which the Father hath set within His own authority." There is time for everything. The difference between the right and the wrong time may in some cases be one of hours or of minutes, as seems to have been the case on this occasion, for a little later—at most an hour or two later—Christ renders the help which His Mother had intimated to Him was required. Perhaps He was waiting till the want became more felt and more urgent; according to the

saying, "When need is highest, God is nighest." But what is certain is that He *did* wait; He waited for the moment decreed by God for Him. In other cases the difference between the right and the wrong moment may be one of days, as we see in the way in which Christ helped the sorrowing sisters at Bethany. He did not at once set out and heal their brother Lazarus as soon as they sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick." He abode two days in the place where He was, and did not set out for Bethany until the illness of Lazarus had ended in death. In this case we know from Himself that the confirmation of His disciples' faith was one of the reasons which determined the delay. "I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe."

And sometimes no doubt the difference between the right and the wrong time may be one of years or of centuries, as in the case of prayers for deliverance from trouble, or deliverance from temptations, or the coming of God's Kingdom. And it is just in cases of this kind, when God's ear seems to be closed against us, and He deals with us as if He had forgotten us or ceased to care for us, that this last recorded saying of Christ's blessed Mother may be a help to us.

She had received no encouragement from Christ.

Rather she had received a rebuke, and a rebuke which looked like a rebuff and a refusal. She had become aware of the distressing difficulty in which their entertainers were placed, a difficulty which, according to Oriental ideas of hospitality, would seem to be specially disgraceful ; and she had reported the matter to her Son, evidently suggesting that He should in some way help. She is told by Him that she ought not to have spoken ; that her action is ill-advised and premature. She accepts the rebuke, but she is not dismayed by it, and she recognizes that postponement is not refusal. On the contrary, what might seem to a careless petitioner, who did not know the character of the person whom he addressed, to be a rejection of the prayer for help, is seen by her to be almost a promise of help. " Mine hour is not *yet* come " implies that in good time the hour will come. Besides which she knows her Son too well to doubt that in a case in which need is great, and help can be given, He will refuse to help. Her thirty years' experience of Him assure her of that. What He had not done because of her misplaced claim upon Him He would do in accordance with higher claims. It might not, as the Venerable Bede says, be done as she wished, but she did not doubt that He would do what was really needful. She is quite ready to stand on one side and leave



the *time* of rendering help and the *manner* of rendering help entirely to Him. But she is not put out of temper by the check which she has received. She does not stand on one side in the spirit in which many of us would have done so. "Well, I have made my suggestion: and, as it isn't liked, I wash my hands of the matter." There is nothing of that kind here. She is still anxious to help, and ready to help in a humbler way. It is possible that when the time for solving the difficulty comes, the assistance of the household servants may be required. She knows the servants, for she was at the house before the wedding guests arrived; and it may be of some use if she tells them to be ready to execute the orders of one of the guests. It is not usual for guests to give orders in the house of their entertainers, and she endeavours to anticipate this difficulty. Lest the servants should be surprised and perplexed, she prepares them for what may be coming, and gives them a very comprehensive charge, "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it."

It is a second instance, recorded for our instruction, of her complete trust in Him. Seventeen years earlier than this, when He was only twelve years old, she was not afraid to leave Jerusalem without Him on their return to Galilee, feeling quite sure that, whether He was with Joseph or



with friends from Nazareth, such a Child would not do anything that was not right. Her confidence in Him would be still stronger now. She has no anxiety as to what He may wish to have done, or as to what orders He may give the servants. Anything that He requires they may execute. "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it."

These last recorded words of the Mother of the Lord, although spoken to the servants at the marriage-feast at Cana, and probably meant by her for them alone, have not been *recorded* for the servants. At the time when they were written down by that disciple who, in accordance with Christ's dying charge, had taken her to his own home, probably all those servants were in their graves. The words have been recorded for our sakes. They are the last charge of the Mother of the Redeemer to the servants of Christ throughout all time. Could she have left us a better one? one more simple? more conclusive?

And note *when* she gives it. Not on her death-bed, about which we know nothing. Not when her Divine Son left the world to return to His Heavenly Father. Not when His work was finished, and she was taken away by her adopted Son from the Cross. It is at the very *beginning* of His ministry, on the eve of His *first* miracle, that she gives what looks like a mere direction for

the moment to some servants in a small town in Galilee, but which *we* may regard as a solemn farewell charge to the whole of Christendom. It is as if she had recognized, as the Baptist had recognized respecting the Christ, that henceforth He must increase, but she must decrease. She had brought Him into the world, had reared Him, and had helped to educate Him for His great work; and now the work had begun, and her glorious, but humble, part in it is over. Although, more than any human being, she had known Christ after the flesh, henceforth knows she Him so no more. Ties of relationship, which had once been paramount, are paramount no longer; and the claim which she once had upon Him is now transferred to the whole world, and especially to those who are willing to become His loyal servants. An angel had pronounced her to be blessed. Christ Himself said afterwards, "Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it."

It is, therefore, a remarkable thing that, just after this momentous change has taken place in her relations to her Divine Son, we have two sayings of hers recorded, and no more. In one of them she makes an attempt—a slight one, it is true, but still an attempt—to interfere in His work; and she is rebuked for so doing. In the other of them she forthwith accepts the position

assigned to her, and, without resentment or complaint, endeavours to help Him in what He may be pleased to do. And, in this loyal submission to One Who had formerly obeyed her, she has her reward. The simple words which she spoke then, in the humble hope of smoothing the way for Him on that single occasion, have been preserved, and are the latest words of hers that have been preserved, and have therefore acquired a special significance. If we use them aright they may, generation after generation, be a means of smoothing the way of Christ in His work of drawing souls to Himself throughout all the ages. His Mother has left this charge to everyone who has come in any measure to know her Son: "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." How troubled those servants at the marriage-feast must have been when they saw the wine-cups of the guests becoming empty, and knew that the bridegroom's store of wine was exhausted. She gave them a word of encouragement, and intimated that the surest way out of the difficulty would be to give implicit obedience to whatever Jesus commands. It has been so ordered in the Providence of God that she should give the same word of encouragement to us. The silence of all four Gospels as to all her subsequent sayings gives a special emphasis to this one; and we may take it as meant for

ourselves. *We* have our troubles and perplexities, and there are times when they seem to be overwhelming. But in all such seasons of trial there are some commands of Christ about which there can be no doubt, some duties which beyond all question we ought to do. Let us pay more than ordinary attention to them, and do what we are quite sure about with increased care. Trouble too often makes us slack about plain duties. But the loyal discharge of plain duties is often a refuge from trouble and sometimes a remedy for it. But, whether we are in trouble or in prosperity, we can have no better guide for our daily life than the last recorded utterance of the Mother of the Lord, "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it."

And let us also take to ourselves the command which He gave to those servants: "Fill the water-pots with water." All round us the empty water-pots are standing. Like those at Cana, they say nothing; but their very emptiness is mutely eloquent, and the Lord speaks for them. There are dreary homes, empty of Christian peace and Christian affection: ignorant minds, empty of everything that can instruct, and enlighten, and ennoble: desolate, withered hearts, empty of all that can brighten, and quicken, and console. Our great cities, hardly less than the distant regions of our great Empire, swarm with heathen,

whose condition is one long spiritual thirst, ever recalling the charge, "Fill the waterpots with water."

Yes; fill them with water. Water is all that we have to give—something of human sympathy, something of our substance, of our time, and of our prayers. But let us remember those willing servants who, at Mary's bidding, following Christ's command, filled, and filled to the brim. Let us, also at her bidding, be on the alert to pour forth gladly that which He allows us and invites us to bestow. And let us not doubt that He will again do His part. What we have brought as water will at His word become wine, not only to refresh with human pity, but to strengthen with Divine power, both those who receive and those who give it.

## XVI

### S. JAMES THE GREAT

"But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask. Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? And they said unto Him, We can."—S. MARK x. 38, 39.

JAMES, the son of Zebedee and Salome, is the only one of the Apostles of whose life and death we can speak with absolute certainty. With the exception, perhaps, of a shred of tradition which is not altogether untrustworthy, all that we know of him we have on the authority of Holy Scripture.

Of his youth and early years we are ignorant. There is little on which to base even a conjecture. But the history of his call, first to be a disciple, and then to be an Apostle, is familiar to all of us.

He and his brother are two of the three Apostles who came within the innermost circle of their Lord's friends, the ἐκλεκτῶν ἐκλεκτότεροι who are with Him on various great occasions, when none of the others were admitted. At the raising of Jairus's daughter, at the Transfiguration, and at

the Agony, Peter and James and John alone are present.

It was seemingly at their call to be Apostles that James and his brother John received their name of "Sons of Thunder"—a title assuredly not given them because they heard the voice like thunder from Heaven, but a name at once expressive of their natural disposition and prophetic of their career.

*Expressive of their Natural Disposition.*—Christian art has so habituated us to conceive of the beloved disciple as one whose nature was gentle, yielding, and wellnigh feminine in type, that we are apt to let the other side of his character pass almost without notice. Whatever we may do in the case of his brother James, it is rarely as a "Son of Thunder" that we think of S. John. Yet how true the name was of both of them is shown by one or two recorded instances—*e.g.*, when they were so forward to rebuke him who cast out devils in Christ's name, but followed not them; when they wished to call down fire from Heaven upon the Samaritan village which would not receive their Lord; when (as in the case before us) they asked to sit in the highest places in their Master's Kingdom.

*Prophetic of their Career.*—The vehement and intense zeal which had thus exhibited itself in an



unchastened form did not silently evaporate in after-life, but remained burning still, though no longer impetuous or fanatical ; leading James to be the first Apostolic martyr, and John to be the Apostle of Love—that greatest Love, which can not only lay down its life, but can dare to live on in years and years of sorrow and loneliness, for its friends.

“Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto Him, We can.” It was a bold answer. Yet we can scarcely venture to call it presumptuous. So far from rebuking or contradicting them, Christ declares that they are true, and shall indeed be fulfilled. But even if they were too daring at the time when they were uttered, the sequel would seem to justify them.

Let us confine our attention to S. James. How far can we say of him that he drank of his Master’s cup of suffering, and was baptized with that baptism of blood through which his Master passed? Surely in a very high degree. Christ’s sufferings on earth were of two sorts, active and passive—those which were the result of action and energy, and those which had their being in mere silent endurance. Neither of these were wanting in S. James. Of the fourteen years which elapsed between the Ascension and his martyrdom we

know hardly anything respecting him, except that, like the rest of the Apostles, he persevered in prayer. Yet we may, perhaps, gather this much more by inference: that during all these years he was somewhat falling into the background as regards external influence and position. The silence respecting him (which is the more marked in that his former companions Peter and John become even more prominent than before) points to this. And it may have been for this reason that Herod Agrippa chose him as his first victim; for it was only when he saw that the execution of James pleased the Jews that he proceeded to take Peter also. But there is further evidence still. In the earlier part of their history James is (with *one* exception) *always* placed before John; and in two cases John is described as "the brother of James," indicating that James, from age, or character, or both, took a higher rank than his brother. In the last scene the position is changed. "He killed James, the brother of John, with the sword." And if this inference is true, we do not find S. James making any effort to fight against the course of events. If only Christ was preached effectively, he could rejoice, though others might win the renown, and he remain in obscurity and prayer. Of his own most loving, most lovable, brother, he might say, in the words of another

who had preceded him in martyrdom at the hands of a Herod: "He must increase, but I must decrease." There is no contention *now* between them which of them should be accounted the greatest; no seeking for the right-hand or the left-hand place. If there is any rivalry now between them, it is as to which of them, in the sphere allotted to him, shall best serve his Lord.

Still more plain is it that in active suffering S. James could partake of his Master's cup and baptism. Herod Agrippa was at once a statesman and a bigot, combining the political suppleness of Pilate with the religious rigidity of a Pharisee. Unlike his predecessors, he was a scrupulous observer of the Law. Policy and inclination alike would lead him to lay violent hands on those who professed allegiance to some other King of the Jews, and who declared that the Jewish ceremonial was valueless. Whether James *could* have fled from persecution, or have avoided death by apostasy, we cannot tell. Possibly Herod was determined to make a victim of him in any case. But whatever opportunities of escape S. James may have had, certainly he never used them. Princes might persecute him without a cause, but yet he swerved not from God's commandments. He preferred rather to suffer than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a

season. And so he met his end like the Master he had served now for seventeen years, sacrificed by a politic ruler to the wrong-headed patriotism of an expiring people.

Judged by the standard of the world, S. James' career was scarcely a success. The obscure follower of a Galilean teacher, who even in his own narrow circle seemed to lose rather than to gain in influence and renown; an enthusiast, who at the outset incurred the rebuke even of his own Master, and in the end was cut off before his time, murdered in the prime of life, in order to make the way more smooth for a political adventurer—"No doubt he had his virtues," says the world; "let us hope they were their own reward; it would appear from his history that he won no other."

How shallow, how untrue, such an estimate of him is, you hardly need to be told. *We* know how stupendous is the glory of a faithful Apostle, and that even among Apostles S. James was great. It may have been that in his later years others took a more prominent part than he. But who will dare to say that his influence over the world's history has been one whit the less on that account? or that his heavenly crown may not be all the brighter for it now? At least we know that he had that spirit of self-denial without which no man can be great. When he heard a call which he recognized

as high in its humility and noble in its very obscurity, he could even *leave all* in order to obey it. When a life of suffering and persecution, ending, perhaps, in a violent death, was set before him as the condition of a *hope* of advancement in his Master's Kingdom, he unhesitatingly *accepted* the condition with that daring answer, so startling in its promptness, "We can."

Is such a call, such a statement of conditions, utterly impossible for us? Do we feel sure that we shall never be summoned to leave all and follow Christ? that the Cup which He drank of, and the Baptism that He was baptized with, are things for a past age of Apostles, but are quite out of the question for ordinary Christians now? Believe me, it is very far otherwise. Nay, it is perhaps hardly too much to say that sooner or later in life some such call *must* come—a call, perhaps, not literally to give up all that we *possess*, but to give up *much*, it may be *all*, of that for which we chiefly care to live.

To renounce, to give up, to deny self—this is the lesson which we all have to learn. He only who is beginning to learn it is beginning to live; he only who has in some degree practised it is fit to die. It is the call to this which must meet us, if it has not met us already, whether it be in the morning, or noonday, or not till the evening of

life. Let us be on the watch for it, for it will come; not, perhaps, a call to a life of active suffering, still less to a martyr's death—more probably a call to a life of quiet endurance, which, as being less exciting, may be all the more hard to bear. Meanwhile, let us pray that we may have light enough to recognize it when it comes, and love enough to obey.

But though calls of this sort come only once or twice in a lifetime, there are others, less wide in their sphere, which come to us much more frequently—those smaller fears, and temptations, and sorrows, which make up so much of our daily life. Each one of these, however trifling it may be, points to that Cup of Suffering and that Baptism of Blood, and calls us to endure.

The life of many of us in *this* place might seem to a looker-on to be peculiarly free from such trials. The ease and gaiety which sparkle on the surface of our daily routine of occupations might well lead a mere spectator to suppose that there could be but little of difficulty or of sadness underneath. There is no need to live here long in order to know that such an opinion is far removed from the truth; for most of us, whether we have been here a long or a short time, memories of the past, temptations in the present, and fears about the future, are day by day proving



this only too thoroughly. Thoughts of days wasted and worse than wasted, hourly experience of temptations to which our own weakness in times gone by has given a terrible power now, forebodings of increasing weakness and increasing temptations—these are the things which trouble us, and which in hours of quiet and loneliness will intrude on even the most careless and the most gay.

And besides all these, there are the losses and disappointments of life. The trial which seems to have come upon S. James in his later years, of seeing others apparently outstrip him in the race, is one which in very various spheres must always be very common here. The alternations of success and failure, which chequer the lives of most men, are very plainly seen among ourselves. The lines of demarcation are not always deep, but they are for the most part very clearly drawn. The contests are more frequent than in later life, and the victors and the vanquished are more easily known. Numbers of us are perpetually being called to undergo the trial of success, or to taste the bitterness of failure. The former may find a safeguard, the latter may find comfort, in looking calmly onwards to what must be the end of all—

“ Thankful for all God takes away,  
Humbled by all He gives.”



Even in this life success and failure are far less to look at in the past than in the present or the future. Those who have experienced both can tell us how slightly the triumphs and the defeats of former years affect them now. If *time* can work such a change, how will it be in eternity? From the other side of the grave the difference between success and failure here will be hardly distinguishable; the two will almost merge in a point. It will be seen that in their most important characteristic they were alike, both being means of winning our way to Heaven.

Let us endeavour to gain something of *that* point of view *now*.

The Tree of Knowledge is very, very precious, but it is less precious than the Tree of Life. The flowers and fruits of that earthly Tree are fair indeed, but their brilliancy will sometimes dazzle, their variety perplex us. Their sweetness is not always free from taint. It is sometimes sickly—nay, even savours of death. Far otherwise is it with the Tree of Life. There grow the blossoms whose beauty is not of this world. There hangs the fruit which whoso eateth shall live for ever. Thence may we gather store into our garners which shall serve us, not only through time, but in eternity. Let us, then, while paying our bounden homage to the Tree of Knowledge,

not forget that higher and more holy worship which we owe to the nobler and more enduring Tree.

The fruits of wisdom which we gather here below should only lead us onward to that which is above. And if the spoils which we win here are but scanty and poor—nay, even if it be God's will that we should altogether pass them by—let us not repine at that. Earthly knowledge, earthly brilliancy, earthly success — all these things will pale away and be as nothing in that day when, alike with the wisest philosopher and the simplest babe, we shall attain to that knowledge which alone is lasting, alone is satisfying—to know our Father and our God even as we are known.

## XVII

### BALAAM

“And when Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel, he went not, as at other times, to seek for enchantments, but he set his face toward the wilderness.” — NUMBERS XXIV. 1.

THE story of Balaam is one of the most fascinating in the whole of the Old Testament. It is so picturesque, so full of dramatic and moral interest, so replete with perplexity, and therefore with instruction. I say “therefore with instruction,” because perplexity sets us thinking, and it is a good thing for us to be made to think.

Yet it may be doubted whether those who are set thinking by the story of Balaam generally direct their thoughts to those incidents in it which are most profitable. What attracts many people is the startling episode about the prophet being rebuked for his blind obstinacy by his own ass. People ask whether this part of the story is a metaphor, or is the narrative of what took place in a vision or dream, or is to be understood

literally ; and against taking it literally they urge the impossibility of teaching an animal with the mouth of an ass to utter human words. As if God could not make words come from the mouth of an ass, as from a burning bush or from a cloud in the sky. But there are things in the story of Balaam which are far more worthy of careful consideration than the difficulty (if difficulty there be) about the speaking ass. Among other interesting and instructive points are these two : (1) the apparent inconsistency in God's treatment of Balaam ; and (2) the apparent inconsistency in the conduct of Balaam himself. These two, to a certain extent, run parallel to one another, but to a large extent they may be treated separately.

I. The apparent inconsistency in God's treatment of Balaam consists in this : that while Balaam seems to be scrupulously keeping within the limits of God's commands, God is angry with him, and tells him that, but for the ass, who was a more willing servant of Jehovah than her master was, Balaam would have been slain by the angel's sword. Balak, King of the Moabites, had sent to Balaam to bribe him to come and curse the Israelites. Balaam had asked God's leave to go, and God had refused to grant it, and Balaam did not go. Balak had then sent a much larger offer,

and Balaam again endeavoured to learn God's will, protesting all the while that, even if he were allowed to go, he could utter only what God told him to say; he could not promise to utter a curse. This time God told him to go, but to speak only the word which God put in his mouth. Upon that Balaam started to go to Balak, and forthwith we read that "God's anger was kindled because he went." Up to this point Balaam appears to have done nothing but what God had given him leave to do. Then why was God angry with him? There are some who tell us that in the story of Balaam, as we have it, can be traced two separate stories, an older and simpler story, and a later and more elaborate one. These two have been blended together into one story, and the blending of them has produced this apparent contradiction in the attitude of Jehovah towards the prophet; and it is suggested that in the original history of Balaam no such contradiction would be found. It will not be worth our while to spend time in considering whether these suggestions are likely to give us a reasonable solution of the difficulty. What we have to consider is the story as it stands in our Bibles, and the perplexity to which it gives rise is a reasonable one, and we must try to find the answer to it. We may be quite sure that God was not angry without reason,

and that Balaam was not told that he deserved to die when he had done nothing but what was in harmony with God's will. God's strong condemnation of Balaam's conduct shows that Balaam was doing what he knew to be wrong. What, then, was the wrong thing that Balaam was knowingly doing? The answer to this question will bring us within the limits of our second difficulty—viz., the apparent inconsistency in the conduct of Balaam himself.

2. Balaam was a Gentile prophet, which to a Jew would seem to be almost a contradiction in terms. [He was of heathen descent and dwelt among heathen, and yet had an extraordinary knowledge of the true God, Whose will he interpreted to his fellow-men.] And this intimacy with the Divine counsels had brought him a great reputation. Men recognized that those whom he blessed were blessed, and that those whom he cursed were cursed. He was regarded as a sorcerer or magician of great power; and it is possible that before the Bible story opens he had been tempted to make a trade of these spiritual gifts, so as to acquire not only honour, but wealth, by means of them. Still, we have no right to assume this. All that we know is that Balak thought that Balaam could be induced by royal commands and gifts to curse the people of Israel, just as the King

of Syria thought that Elisha could be induced by royal commands and gifts to heal Naaman of his leprosy. The elders of Moab and Midian came with the rewards of divination in their hands, ready to pay this great wizard (as they regarded him) for uttering a destructive spell. Ought not Balaam to have dismissed them at once? He knew that when he spoke inspired words the words were not his, but God's; he says so himself. Ought he not at once to have rejected the idea of taking money for such words? But he does not at once reject the idea. He entertains it. He would like to have the money. Possibly it will be God's will that the Israelites should be cursed. He tells the elders to stay all night, and he will inquire of God. And God said: "Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed." And Balaam told the princes of Balak in the morning that God had refused to give him leave to go. That way of putting it shows the man's heart. He had not simply wished to do God's will, whatever it might be. He had tried to bend God's will to his; had tried to get leave to do something which he ought to have known was contrary to God's will.

Do any of you chance to remember those two beautiful stories in Herodotus in which the oracle is consulted about a plain matter of duty? In one



of them the people of Cymæ ask the oracle whether they are to give up to his enemies a man who has taken sanctuary with them as a suppliant for protection. In the other a man named Glaucus asks the oracle whether he is to give up a sum of money which had been entrusted to him. After a lapse of many years the sons of the man who deposited the money had come and claimed it. Need he surrender it? The inquirers are told by the oracle that to ask such questions is in itself a crime; indeed, is as bad as committing the very crime about which they have inquired. They may go and commit the wickedness which was in their hearts, for they have already incurred the guilt of it. Something very like this happens in the case of Balaam.

Balak sends a second time with a still more tempting offer. If Balaam will but come and curse Israel he shall have anything that he likes to ask: "Whatsoever thou sayest unto me I will do." This time surely the prophet had no need, had no right, to inquire as to what he must do. God had expressly told him on the first occasion: "Thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed." But Balaam does not reject the offer at once. He longs to accept it, and once more tries whether he cannot induce God to give up His will and follow Balaam's. And God granted the

prophet's unrighteous prayer (just as in later days He granted Israel's unrighteous prayer, when the people asked for a King), and gave Balaam leave to go; but on condition of his speaking nothing but what God put in his mouth. And next morning Balaam set out. With what intention did he set out? Of course with the intention of winning the King's magnificent offer. He would never have cared to go but for that. And, although he meant to obey God's commands respecting the curse which Balak wanted, yet he hoped to make God change these commands; and, if he failed in this, he hoped to be able to circumvent them. This is why God is angry with him. Although Balaam has not yet spoken a word against Israel, he is quite *ready* to curse God's people, and is revolving in his mind how he may be able to gratify Balak and win the great reward. He has disobeyed God in his heart; for his determination to abide by the letter of God's command is accompanied by a lurking intention of finding some way of violating the spirit of it.

And this is no mere conjecture. No less than five times does Balaam try to bring God over to the side which he knew was against God's will. He does this twice, as we have seen, in his own home before setting out for Moab. And he does it three times more when he reaches Balak. Like

the heathen which he was at heart, in spite of the illumination which had been granted to him, he thinks that the will of God can be changed by elaborate sacrifices. Three times over seven altars are built at his desire, and a bullock and a ram are offered on every altar; and each time the demand made is lowered. May he curse the whole people? May he curse a part? May he curse a still smaller part? All the way through, Balaam is struggling to get his own way in spite of what God has plainly told him. His prayer is, "Not Thy will, but mine be done"; and he is more than willing that all the thousands of Israel should be smitten with God's curse, if only he may win the offered reward.

Thus the apparent inconsistency in God's treatment of the prophet and the real inconsistency in Balaam's treatment of God are explained together. God was angry with Balaam for persistently wishing to do what he knew was contrary to God's will, and the fact that Balaam did not openly defy God did not free him from God's displeasure. As we see from the sequel, Balaam was bent on having his own way. He would have liked to have it with God's consent. But when he was not allowed to curse Israel, he contrived that the Israelites should bring a curse on themselves. But the curse fell on him also. He did not live to

enjoy the wages of unrighteousness, but was slain by the people whose ruin he had tried to bring about.

Bishop Butler, in what is, perhaps, the most famous sermon in the English language, has pointed out the amazing inconsistencies in the character of Balaam. But at the same time he warns us that such characters are not uncommon. There will always be people who shrink from flagrant transgressions of God's laws, and yet cherish great wickedness in their heart—wickedness which they intend to enjoy whenever they can persuade their consciences that the enjoyment is not really very wicked. Such people reflect with satisfaction that there are many sins which they never commit. As for the indulgences which they do allow themselves, they are, perhaps, not so very wrong ; and, even if they are, they will make atonement for them, and they quite mean to give them up some day. In this spirit manifest duties are considered and reconsidered, until they are explained away ; and the confused and baffled conscience at last gives wrong judgment, or ceases to speak at all. All of us have something of this self-deceit to guard against. Let us, with Balaam in his better moments, cease to seek for enchantments wherewith to stifle the Divine voice within us. Let us, with him, yearn to die the death

of the righteous. But, warned by him, let us remember that this means *living* the *life* of the righteous, having as our constant aim, not our own gain and enjoyment, but the fulfilment by us and in us of the will of God.

## XVIII

### ELI

“ In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house : when I begin, I will also make an end.”—I SAMUEL iii. 12.

THE pathos of the history of Eli is none the less intense because it is so familiar to us. It is one of those Bible stories which we have known from our childhood. The little Samuel being called by God in the night to become a prophet against his spiritual father Eli is one of those pictures which we can remember almost as far back as we can remember anything. There is a childlike simplicity about both the chief actors of the story, the aged Eli as well as the little Samuel, which is one great element in its pathos. But there are at least two others. There is the unexpected and unexplained rise of Eli to the high and unprecedented position which he held, and there is the predicted and unredeemed retribution which overwhelmed him.

Eli was descended from Aaron's second son

Ithamar, not from his eldest son Eleazar. And yet he had become High-Priest, although there were descendants of Eleazar still living. We do not at all know how this came about, but we see that God's Providence raised Eli to a great position to which his birth did not seem to entitle him. Nor was this all. He was not only High-Priest, but Judge. He was at once both the highest officer in the Church and the highest officer in the State. In modern language, he was both Primate and Prime Minister, and that without any King over him. Perhaps one of the great Prince-Bishops of Durham would come nearest to such a case—Bishop Pudsey, *e.g.*, who during the absence of Richard I. in Palestine was a kind of Regent in the North of England. Eli's Judgeship was a much more exalted office than that of Gideon or Samson. It was not temporary and exceptional, but permanent, and apparently was intended to be hereditary, had not Eli's culpable weakness caused the overthrow of the Divine counsels. "I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before Me for ever; but now the Lord saith, Be it far from Me; for them that honour Me I will honour, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed." And this predicted reversal of God's promises was never to be cancelled. "The iniquity of Eli's



house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever."

It is sometimes said that weak men do more harm than wicked men, and the history of Eli lends much support to the saying. Certainly it shows that what we should call mere weakness is sometimes very severely judged by Almighty God.

It is not difficult to see that, in various ways, weakness may be more mischievous than downright wickedness.

1. Wickedness produces disgust. Such crimes as murder, or cruelty, or adultery, are revolting. Even men who are not at all religious feel a loathing, or at least a contempt, for thoroughly base and gross forms of evil.

2. Flagrant and unmistakable wickedness provokes opposition. We must have fallen low indeed if we feel no disposition to resent and stand out against an arrogant tyranny or a reckless sensuality which spares neither man in its anger nor woman in its lust. If consideration for others does not arm us against the common enemy, at any rate self-interest will move us to do something. For its own sake society cannot allow wickedness to remain unopposed.

3. Wickedness can often be suppressed by law. It is definite and tangible. Transgressors can be known, can be arrested, convicted and punished.

Weakness is the opposite of all this. It is very often amiable and respectable, and keeps the very best of company. So far from disgusting people, it has a kind of charm about it. There are men and women whose want of moral backbone is simply ruinous to everything about them; and yet (as we sometimes say by way of excuse for ourselves and them) "it is impossible to be angry with them." Instead of provoking opposition, they win pity and even sympathy. And when at last people are roused to do something, feeling that this weak drifting into all kinds of evil cannot be allowed to go on, they find that the mischief is very difficult to grapple with. There is so little that is definite and tangible. You can take measures against a person who has clearly transgressed the law, but how are you to deal with one who simply lets things slide?

Eli was not only an amiable, but in some ways a really good man. We may believe that it was because of his good qualities that he was placed out of the regular course into so exalted a position. But, at any rate, there are two facts which speak very clearly as to his general goodness of heart:

1. There is his touchingly humble submission to the stern rebuke sent to him through the child Samuel. Think what it must have been to the

old man, that he, the most exalted person both in Church and State, should be rebuked by a mere child, and a child who was under his care and training. And yet he never resents it even for a moment, and never murmurs either against the severity of the sentence or against God's method of sending it to him. Many a man, even if he could have admitted that he deserved his sentence, would have complained of the humiliating way in which it had been made known to him. Eli simply bows his head in submission, with the words, "It is the Lord: let Him do what seemeth Him good." There, surely, is a pattern for every one of us when we find ourselves condemned by those who seem to have little right to judge us.

2. There is his fortitude in hearing of the defeat of Israel and of the death of his sons, and his grief and horror at the calamity which befell the Ark. He was the highest magistrate in the land. What must it have been for him to hear that the national forces had been utterly defeated by the hateful Philistines! He was an affectionate parent, as his remonstrances with his sons prove. What must it have been to him to learn that they had both been killed in the same battle, and had been cut off in the midst of their wicked careers! Yet all this he bore with fortitude. It

was part of his punishment, and he deserved it. But Eli was not only a judge and a parent : he was also High-Priest. Everything that was sacred to the Lord was very dear to him ; and when he heard that the Ark of God was taken by the idolatrous enemies of Israel, it broke his heart, and " he fell from off his seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died."

But if his general goodness of heart and intention is clear, no less clear is his deplorable weakness of will. Two facts speak for that also :

1. His failing to restrain his sons. He knew all about their wickedness, and he was not indifferent to it. He knew the enormity of it ; how evil it was in itself, and what widespread scandal it caused, especially to the cause of religion. Yet he would not take the vigorous measures which were required to put a stop to it, in spite of a special warning sent to him by a man of God respecting it. He contented himself with remonstrances which he saw were powerless. Yet he was not powerless. He could have stopped the mischief. Jewish law allowed a father a large measure of authority over sons. Moreover, Eli was not only the father of these wicked young priests : he was also their High-Priest and their

Judge. He could have deposed them from their office. He could have imprisoned them, or in various other ways could have severely punished them ; but he did not. He let things drift. " His sons brought a curse upon themselves, and he restrained them not."

2. His weakness is also shown by his allowing the Ark to be taken into the camp. The people had clamoured for this, superstitiously supposing that it would have some magic influence over their enemies. Eli, of course, knew better, and as High-Priest could have prevented such profanation. But, with characteristic weakness, he once more allowed things to take their course.

What were the consequences of it all ? What were the results of the moral cowardice of this kind-hearted and religious old man ?

There was, first of all, the utter degradation of his sons, who stand out as the types of grasping and sensual ecclesiastics throughout all ages.

There was, secondly, the scandal to religion. " Men abhorred the offering of the Lord."

Thirdly, there was the curse on his whole family, which was never to be reversed.

Nor did the evil end with Eli and his house. There was the utter defeat of the whole nation, which seems to have been largely caused by the

evil conduct of Hophni and Phinehas. And, as a standing memorial of God's judgments upon such weakness, there is the perpetual desolation of Shiloh.

How this came about we are nowhere told; but the overthrow or rapid decay of Shiloh soon followed, and it became a proverb as a monument of Divine retribution. "Then will I make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth." And again: "This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate without an inhabitant." And so completely has the desolation obliterated all trace of the former town and sanctuary that the site of it has been only with difficulty rediscovered.

These things have something more than historic interest. There is still plenty of moral weakness in the world, and it still bears its appointed fruit of moral and physical desolation. The fatal policy of letting things drift, of never lifting a finger to withstand or correct the evil of which we are well aware, is one which, as of old, leads surely, if slowly, to disaster. We can never afford to throw discipline to the winds, and leave conduct to take care of itself. Whether we will or no, we are always our brother's keeper, and even the humblest among us have influence for which they must give account. When we are tempted to lower

the standard of what we know to be right, let us remember the judgment which has been pronounced against him who allows others to bring a curse upon themselves, and restrains them not.



## XIX

### BLIND BARTIMÆUS

“Jesus of Nazareth passeth by.”—S. LUKE xviii. 37.

BLIND BARTIMÆUS sitting by the wayside begging is a type of the condition of many among ourselves. We are spiritually blind. We cannot see our way aright. We are ignorant of our present position. We do not know whether it is a safe one or not; whether we ought to remain in it or fly from it; and, if we were assured that we ought to fly, we should not know in what direction to turn. We are morally poverty-stricken. We have no store of good habits, no wealth of character. Our good deeds have been few and far between, and they have been fitfully and grudgingly performed. They have added little to our strength of will or warmth of heart. As regards the attainment of virtue, we are still in a bankrupt and beggarly condition. We are off the road, making no progress. Tired of our half-hearted efforts and our want of success, we have left the track, wearied, baffled, and bewildered. We think it is useless to

go on striving any longer. It will be best to give up and surrender ourselves to the course of events. Such poor results as we have to show are not worth the toil that it costs us to produce them. And we are not alone in our trouble. There are others with us, as blind, and as poverty-stricken, and as unsuccessful as ourselves. We and they have helped to mislead one another in our blindness.

So far the resemblance between our own condition and that of Bartimæus and his companion (for, although S. Luke does not mention him, we are told by S. Matthew that he had a companion) is tolerably exact. God grant that it may be still more exact in the other features of the picture which still remain to be noticed!

1. Bartimæus *knows* that he is blind. He is not under the smallest delusion on that point. It never occurs to him to suppose that, as regards sight, he is in no worse condition, or perhaps is even in far better condition, than most of his neighbours. He is not guilty of the folly of thinking that he can act as their guide.

2. But, although he knows that he is blind, he has not ceased to hope for a recovery of his sight. There was a time when he might have despaired. But he has heard of the great Prophet of Nazareth, and of the wonderful works of healing which He has wrought. One Who has been so merciful to

others may some day, if he can but meet with Him, show mercy also on him.

3. Meanwhile, having lost his sight, he makes the most of those faculties which he still retains. His ears are always on the alert, and he listens patiently for any sign. When the sound of the march of some unusual multitude reaches him, he questions the bystanders eagerly and persistently as to what it means. And when he is told that Jesus of Nazareth is passing by, he forthwith determines to make the most of this precious opportunity, and cries loudly and ceaselessly for mercy. This conduct provokes criticism, but criticism only strengthens his perseverance. Some of the critics possibly are malicious. They take a delight in thwarting the wishes of other people, and therefore try to prevent the poor beggar from attaining his object. But probably most of them are well-meaning people. They think that the blind man's noise is in bad taste. It is an intrusion. It will disturb Jesus in His journey and in His teaching; and while He is ministering to hundreds it is not reasonable that He should be interrupted for the sake of one.

4. But they are mistaken. The faith and perseverance of the blind are accepted by Him. He stops in the midst of His progress and His discourse, and bids the bystanders bring Bartimæus

and his comrade to Him. It was probably some of those who had just before been finding fault that were made to perform this office for the blind men. "Arise, He calleth thee," is the welcome message which they bring from the centre of the concourse. And then, in his eagerness to reach Him of whom he has heard so much, and from whom he hopes for so much, Bartimæus flings aside his upper garment and presses on without it. It was the most valuable thing which he possessed, but it must not be allowed to delay him now. He would far rather lose it than run the smallest risk of losing the blessed opportunity that has come so close to him. What if, while he is attending to his clothes, Jesus of Nazareth should pass on, out of reach and out of hearing? No thought of his property, no thought of propriety, keeps him back. As soon as he hears that Jesus is calling him, he presses on to reach Him, that no remissness on his part may cause him after all to miss the hoped-for boon.

5. And now that he has received it—now that the priceless gift of sight is once more restored to him—what shall he do with it? What use shall he make of it? At once he consecrates it to the noblest of purposes. Having found his way to Christ without sight, he employs his recovered vision in following Christ. He watches His

movements as He proceeds along the way, and wheresoever Jesus goes he follows. And as he follows, his heart is full of thankfulness and his mouth of praises. He is perpetually glorifying God, and all around him are made aware of the mercy which he has received.

6. And thus the blessing which has come upon his hope and trust and courage does not end with himself. The multitude all around him, even those who had criticized him and would have hindered him from coming to Jesus, catch the warmth of his enthusiasm, and they, too, give praise to God.

Can we claim a likeness to Bartimæus and his companion in these particulars also, as well as in blindness, and poverty, and want of progress? Lent is once more close upon us; and in it, as in all sacred ordinances, Jesus Christ passes by, comes near, and is ready to help us and take us onward with Himself. Let us at least strive to learn how blind we are, how utterly in need of His healing touch. It was to those who said "We see" that He spoke those stern words, "Your sin remaineth." For those who confess their blindness, and pray for light, He has nothing but mercy. Let us, then, listen patiently for any sign of His approach, and be ready to wait humbly in the ditch by the wayside, if only we may lift our prayer to Him.

The profane may scoff at our earnestness ; the over-wise may assure us that to observe times and seasons is superstitious, and that to keep days of fasting and humiliation is to surrender the glorious freedom of the Gospel. But let us still persevere in what we know to be wholesome discipline, full of hope for ourselves, however little it may seem to others to be worth what it costs to carry it out. And when Christ draws near and makes His presence known to us—above all, when He assures us through His ministers and His holy word that it is His will that we should come to Him—yes, poor and blind as we are, that we should come to Him—let us beware lest any clinging prejudices, any false shame, any fear of what men may say to us or of us, should keep us back from Him, or delay us in our going to Him. It is here that we show our real belief, our genuine trust, in Him, if we are ready to fling away anything, no matter how precious it may be to us, that could in any way hinder us from accepting His invitation to come to Him.

And when this crisis is safely past, and we are at last in His presence and feel Him close to us, then again let the blind man be our guide. When Jesus asked him, “What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?” he replied, “Lord, that I may receive my sight.” It was a plain, straightforward

answer. Bartimæus knew what he needed; he asked for it, and he received it. We need more directness and more reality in our prayers. We have but a vague idea of what our souls require, and consequently we are indolent and half-hearted in asking for it. Let us learn to bring our wants before Him in plain and earnest language that comes straight from our hearts. We tell Him in a vague, listless way that we are "miserable sinners," and we ask in an equally vague and listless way for forgiveness and grace. But what are the precise sins that need forgiveness? What are the graces that we specially need? Let us realize all this definitely ourselves, and then pour out our requests before Him. Our Lent will not have been thrown away if it teaches us to be more direct and definite in our prayers.

And thus may our forty days be spent in seeking Jesus, as He passes by in the memorials of His Temptation and His Passion. And when we have found Him, and received from Him the blessing of an enlightened and purified conscience, let us in our Easter happiness still remember to keep close to Him, to follow Him in the way glorifying God, that others also may recognize His goodness, and with us give praise unto God.

"Jesus of Nazareth passeth by." Those words tell of an opportunity, of a crisis, which is upon



us, and will soon be gone. What use are we going to make of it? Avoid it we cannot; shirk the responsibility of it we cannot. In the observances of this holy season Jesus is once more coming near to us—to some of us, it may be, for the last time. If we let Him pass by now, we may have no other opportunity in this world. Let us not ask what others are doing; not look too anxiously to see whether they approve our conduct or not. Let us pray often and earnestly, “Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me”; and in His good time will come the blessed assurance, “Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole.”

## XX

### THE VENERABLE BEDE

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give unto them eternal life.”—S. JOHN x. 27.

THERE are not many persons to whom one would venture to apply these words with greater confidence than to the saint whose name is so familiar to all of us in this place, and beside whose tomb some of us kneel very frequently—the Venerable Bede. He was indeed one of Christ’s sheep, who heard His voice, was known to Him, and followed Him; and all Christendom believes that he is one of those to whom the Good Shepherd has given eternal life.

The day on which Bede entered into his rest is commemorated on May 27. The exact year and day in which Bede died cannot be fixed with absolute certainty, but May 27 can hardly be quite right, although it is not far wrong. This most lovable of scholars seems to have passed away on the eve of the Ascension, towards eventide—*i.e.*, after the great festival had begun. And

if the year in which he died was 735, as is commonly believed, and as is probably correct, then it was on the evening of May 25 that we ought to think of him as breathing his last, while singing the *Gloria Patri*.

But the exact day on which Bede's life of sixty-two years came to an end is of less moment to us than some knowledge of his work and character. It is in what he did and was that we can find instruction for ourselves. As William of Malmesbury truly says of him, he was "a man whom it is easier to *admire* than to extol as he deserves"; and perhaps one may add to that, that it is still more easy to *love* him. In the whole of our national history, rich as it is in lives of men who excite our admiration and kindle our affection, it would be hard to find a character more truly lovable than Bede. But in order to love a man one must know him, and the only way in which to know Bede, as he deserves to be known, is to read him. And he has left us plenty to read, especially his "Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation"—which will always remain one of the chief sources of information respecting the first centuries of our national life—and his commentaries on Holy Scripture. In these works, to mention no others, we seem to have, gathered into one, some of the best characteristics which English literature dis-

played a thousand years later : the warm devotion of Jeremy Taylor and the sweet quaintness of George Herbert, combined with the profound earnestness of the writers of the "Pilgrim's Progress" and of the "Saints' Rest."

In his birth and education, as in his life and in his death, Bede was "a son of peace." And the age into which he was born was an age of peace. The struggle between the English and the British peoples had just come to an end. The English down the eastern part of the island and the British down the western part were content to live henceforth side by side. From this time forward the Britons made no serious attempt to drive away the powerful immigrants who had occupied more than half their territory.

And the confusion which of necessity had prevailed in the newly-founded Church of England had just come to an end also. The great Theodore of Tarsus, who was Archbishop of Canterbury for twenty-two years, was bringing order out of the chaos at the time when Bede was born. And therefore we may say that the birthday of Bede coincides with the birthday of peace between the British and English nations, and with the birthday of peace and order in the English Church.

It also coincides with the birthday of English literature, which, like that of most countries, has

its origin in poetry and religion. A thousand years before Milton wrote his great religious poem, a servant in S. Hild's Monastery at Whitby sang the sacred narratives of the Old and New Testaments in English verse, just a few years before Bede was born. "Others after him," says Bede, "tried to make religious poems, but none could rival him, for he learned the art of poetry not from men, but from God." English *prose* begins with Bede himself, and it also has its source in religion. The first piece of English prose-writing that is known to us is Bede's translation of the Gospel of S. John, in completing which he died.

When we add to this that, thanks to the energy of Theodore of Tarsus and others, permanent and efficient *schools* had been planted at Canterbury and elsewhere, we see that the age into which Bede was born was, compared with those which preceded and followed it, one of peace and hopefulness. The conquests of the English invaders are over; those of the Danish invaders have not yet begun. To dwell on Bede's life in its chronological setting is like reading the Book of Ruth between the Book of Judges and the Books of Samuel and Kings. It is a bright and peaceful idyll between two stern and stormy epics—a resting-place on which the eye of the student,

bewildered by rapid changes, and wearied by the turmoil of countless battlefields, dwells with grateful contentment. The anarchy of the days in which every man did that which was right in his own eyes has passed from view. The inroads of the Syrians have not yet begun.

It would take a long time to give an account of all the books which Bede wrote during this time of comparative peace; but the story of his life, as distinct from his writings, is soon told. Indeed, there is not much that can be added to the brief account of himself which he places at the end of his chief work, the "Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation": "I, Bæda, the servant of Christ, and priest of the monastery of the blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, which is at Jarrow and at Wearmouth, being born in the territory of that same monastery, was given by the care of my relatives, at seven years of age, to be educated by the most reverend abbot, Benedict, and afterwards by Ceolfrid; and, from that period, spending all the remaining time of my life in that monastery, I wholly applied myself to the study of the Scriptures; and, amidst the observance of regular discipline, and the daily care of singing in the Church, I always took delight in learning, teaching, and writing. In the 19th year of my age I received deacon's

orders, in the 30th those of priesthood ; both of them by the ministry of the most reverend Bishop John, and by the order of the abbot Ceolfrid. From which time, when I received the order of priesthood, till the 59th year of my age, I have made it my business, for the use of me and mine, briefly to compile out of the works of the venerable Fathers, and to interpret and explain according to their meaning (adding somewhat of my own), these following pieces." And then follows the long list of his writings.

Short as this statement respecting himself is, it gives us, in a few simple touches, the outlines of a beautiful life—a life spent in quietude, in intelligent self-culture, in veneration for the past, in sympathy with the present, in large-hearted usefulness to man, in profound devotion to God.

Bede says that he "spent all his time in that monastery." *We* should say "in those monasteries." He means the one at Wearmouth, to which he was brought by his relatives out of their loving care for him, and the one at Jarrow, to which he was probably transferred when the latter was completed. But Bede always speaks of them as only one house, both of them being of the same order and under one government. What property there was was held by one corporation, not by two ; and probably the monks went backwards



and forwards freely between the two. With the exception of one journey to York, Bede seems to have gone hardly anywhere else.

“Amidst the observance of regular discipline,” he says, “and the daily care of singing in the Church, I always took delight in learning, teaching, and writing.” There, in a sentence, you have the life of the Christian scholar, the career of one who has consecrated his days to study—not for the mere excitement of learning something fresh, not for the miserly accumulation of knowledge, but for the sake of imparting what is learned, and of leaving the world wiser and brighter than he found it. Bede lived and worked for his scholars: for his hearers in that generation, for his readers in generations still to come; and, as he lies on his death-bed, almost his last thought is for them. He insisted upon going on teaching and dictating almost to the very last. “I don’t want my lads to learn what isn’t true,” he said, “and to spend their labour for nothing when I am gone.” And in these last instructions he would sometimes stop to say, “Learn quickly, for I know not how soon He Who created me may take me away.”

One is not surprised to read that during his many years of “learning, teaching, and writing,” there had gathered round this true-hearted teacher some six hundred students. Teaching carried

on with such affectionate conscientiousness and enthusiasm could not fail to be attractive, especially in an age in which competent teachers were not very common ; and it would not be much exaggeration to say that in Bede's time something like a university existed in these parts, divided, as our own University at the present day, between the banks of the Tyne and the banks of the Wear. Thanks to Benedict and Ceolfrid, the libraries at Jarrow and at Wearmouth were excellent ; and Bede could get men well trained in Latin and Greek to assist him in his work from the great school at Canterbury.

Bede's writings have a variety of characteristics, and it is very interesting work to note and illustrate them. But the one which is perhaps most conspicuous, and at the same time most helpful, is his transparent and simple piety. You cannot read much of his writings without becoming aware of it, and you cannot doubt its reality. There is no parade of it, no working of himself up into a religious frame of mind, nothing forced or morbid. One feels that it is part and parcel of the man himself, and that with him to be natural is to be devout. He was not one of those who thought (as we so often do) that time spent in praise and prayer is just so much time lost to work. And he did not leave his religion on the doorstep when he returned

from service in the church to his work of reading, teaching, and writing. He constantly prays for God's help in his labours. He asks his readers to pray for him in return for what he has tried to do for them, to thank God if he has been allowed to help them, and to ask God to forgive him if he has led them into error. The joy of teachers is made full, he says, when by their teaching many are brought to the communion of the Church and of Him by whom the Church is strengthened and increased.

The story of Bede's death, as it has come down to us from the pen of one who was present, is one of the most beautiful narratives in English history. Read it for yourselves, not once, nor twice. It is more helpful than many a sermon. It may help us to live as he lived, and work as he worked, and thus be able, also, to die as he died.

In these days of mental and physical unrest it is good for us to see how a very quiet and monotonous life could be both very happy and very fruitful—a blessing to the man himself, to all about him, and to all posterity for evermore. Bede shows us how, in the most unexciting surroundings, to make the most of our abilities and opportunities, so as to become useful instruments in the hand of God. In the turmoil and high pressure of modern life even religion itself sometimes becomes noisy and

self-asserting; and doubtless under these conditions it is possible to be Christ's sheep, and hear His voice, and follow Him. But it may be questioned whether this century, with all its marvellous discoveries, has found out for us a better way of following Christ than the life which Bede lived, or a surer way of passing to the eternal life which Christ gives than the death which Bede died.

## NOTE

A more extensive survey of the work of Bede and of the times in which he lived will be found in the writer's "The Churches in Britain before A.D. 1000" (vol. i., pp. 130-146), in *The Library of Historic Theology*, edited by the Rev. W. C. Piercy, and published by Mr. Robert Scott, who kindly allows the sermon out of which that survey was developed to be published here. The volume contains numerous quotations from Bede.

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